

"UNDERSTANDING THE PANCHAKOSHA PRINCIPLE"

*a journey of knowing one's self – key to living a productive
and happy life in all circumstances.*



*“Yoga is the process of the search and union with your true Atman/ soul
(your true self which is in eternal bliss) - Understanding the
Panchakoshas is the true path for this wonderful journey of
self-discovery and liberation from worldly sorrows and stress”*



The concept of Panchakosha was introduced and explained in the ancient text – the **Taittiriya Upanishad** according to which it is foolish to seek the Atman or Soul (our truest self and which is in a state of indestructible bliss) outside in our external environment. This atman is within each person and resides in our own body. We fail to feel and realise it, as it is hidden deep inside of us and covered by layers, described as the koshas. These layers are contaminated by our karma and lifestyles. These contaminated layers prevent us from realising our true selves and experiencing eternal bliss and joy that comes with our union with our atman or true self. Understanding these layers, described as the Panchakoshas is vital to enable us to purify and heal each of these layers to reach and unite with our 'atman' hidden deep insides ourselves. We can use the analogy of an onion to better understand the process. The Panchakoshas are like the onion layers that cover the soul/atman in our inner core. Being in touch with this Atman is the only way to seek indestructible peace and happiness and achieve spiritual liberation.

“When the five sheaths have been purified and healed, the supreme light shines forth, pure, eternally blissful, single in essence, and within” – Taittiriya

This book endeavours to explain the concept of Panchakoshas in a simple manner to allow everyone to get a better understanding of their own selves, an understanding which can help them lead more productive and joyful lives.





WELLNESS AT CARNOUSTIE – A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The Lancet definition of health as ‘the ability of a body to adapt to new threats and infirmities’ published in 2009 and the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” preceding it in 1948 are fundamental reminders that we all need to change our approach and understanding of being healthy.

Over the years the medical fraternity focussed on curing the sick and the wellness proponents unfortunately got clubbed increasingly with vanity and physical fitness. Both seems to have digressed from a more integrated preventive health care as defined by the world’s premier body on world health issues. The vital lesson the pandemic has taught us is that ‘Health’ is not physical health alone. An increasing number of people have reported post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disorders, mood and anxiety disorders caused by the uncertainties of the pandemic, making it abundantly clear that focussing on physical health alone may not be the solution. This stress and anxiety in turn increases the risk of diabetes mellitus, ulcerative colitis, hypertension, heart ailments, high blood pressure and other serious ailments now highlighted as ‘comorbidities’ that have raised the number of fatalities in this pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the need to focus on preventive integrated wellness programs to live a healthier and happy life in harmony with our ecosystem.

While modern medicine focusses on the diagnosis and treatment of diseases and injuries, acute care, and pharmacological solutions, Wellness looks at the health issue holistically and focuses on prevention and healthy life styles that fasten the healing and curative process. For e.g. the doctors address heart ailments only when they get to the stage where surgical intervention is essential; wellness on the other hand would have in all likelihood prevented the problem by addressing its physical, mental and emotional signs before its outset. And for those who come back from surgery, wellness helps them heal faster, physically, mentally and emotionally.

‘Wellness’ has been a buzz word for over two decades. However, the general “one fit for all” approach of corporate wellness and other mass wellness programs diminished the true concept of wellness. Yoga too became a mass seller with people following postures blindly, the benefits of which were limited and not holistic the way they were meant to be. Wellness has to be ‘tailor made’ as each person has unique physical (the ‘dosha’ type in Ayurveda), emotional and mental attributes. For example, the yoga postures and diet that might work well for a particular body type may cause greater damage to another. When one takes the ‘one fit for all’ approach, one assumes that all individuals are alike and of the same prototype. Which is not true. An oily diet may work for some and may cause discomfort to another. Similarly, a rigorous Yoga regimen may aggravate agitation in some and work for others.

At Carnoustie, we respect the uniqueness of each individual and offer personalised programs that address an individual’s specific needs. Experts prepare customised Yoga, Ayurveda and Diet regimens for each individual after a careful analysis of each person’s body type and their unique physical, mental and emotional characteristics, while being mindful of comorbidities if any. The key objective being to enable each individual to live a productive, happy and stress free life in harmony with his/her ecosystem.



UNDERSTANDING THE YOGIC CONCEPT OF PANCHAKOSHAS FOR OUR PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

In 1943, as the world was smack in the middle of the World War II, Abraham Maslow's hierarchical approach to human motivation took the world of psychology and management by storm. The powerful image of a pyramid of needs has been one of the most fascinating ideas in behavioral sciences. Interestingly, this concept was explained in the most detailed manner in the Vedānta or the last chapters of the Vedas, the oldest scriptures known to man.

This vedantic psycho-philosophical view of human personality speaks of human personality layers that can be nurtured and reinforced to refine who we are and how we think and act. Called the Pancha Kosha theory, this theory is the hierarchical theory of personality, a good understanding of which is very useful in an individual's psychological and spiritual development.

Central to this Panchakosha theory is the Atman or the soul. This is the indestructible 'eternal self'. This soul encapsulates the complete universe or the Brahman. The brahman is the definitive reality – the invisible life force that pervades the entire universe. The texts quote an example to elaborate -

“One teacher asks his student to bring him a fig.

“Open it,” says the teacher. “What do you see there?”

“Some very small seeds, sir.”

“Open one of those small seeds. What do you see there?”

“Nothing at all, sir.”

“Truly from what you cannot see, the whole fig tree grows. That is Reality.

That is Atman. That art Thou.”

This atman (spirit or soul) is the purest self-devoid of ego and falsehoods. Reaching this atman is the only way to reach an enlightened state. The true purpose of yoga is to nurture a trusting relationship between our mortal human body and our immortal core where the atman or soul resides. According to the Upanishads, the mortal body has five distinct layers or sheaths called koshas that protect our inner core, the home of the immortal atman. Each of these layers or koshas have their own vibration and can also overlap each other with fluctuating energies effecting the aura or the personality of the individual. Understanding this interplay of koshas helps us understand our progression both in terms of psychological and spiritual growth.

Let's first understand these Koshas:

- Physical- Annamaya Kosha
- Energy- Pranamaya Kosha
- Mental -Manomaya Kosha
- Wisdom- Vijnanamaya Kosha
- Bliss- Anandamaya Kosha



This is the descending order in which they cover the Atman

ANNAMAYA KOSHA

The Sanskrit term 'Anna' means food. This physical kosha depends on food for its nourishment. This sheath is nothing but our physical body comprising of our tissue, muscles, organs and bones. This is the densest and the sturdiest outer sheath and we can keep it healthy and free of toxins by eating right (sattvic diet) and exercising regularly for which Yoga prescribes various Asanas or postures.

PRANAMAYA KOSHA

The Sanskrit term 'Prana' means energy. Prana is the vital force that moves through the body and keeps it alive and energized. Our breath or oxygen is the vehicle of this prana and that is why the moment we lose breath, the body becomes lifeless. Prana is responsible for the functioning of all the vital organs. For e.g. the prana makes the blood flow, carries nutrients from the digestive system to the rest of the body, nerve impulses to the brain and back etc. In Yoga, Pranayama is prescribed to elevate and increase this Prana in the body. Pranayama is a series of breathing exercises which aims at increasing oxygen supply in the body for a more efficient flow of prana or vital life force in the body.

MANAMAYA KOSHA

The word 'Mana' means the mind. This kosha are the thoughts, feelings and emotion that govern the mind. This makes us experience the pain/sorrow and joy/pleasures of life. This Kosha directly impacts the other outer koshas and hence need to be healthy and gratified. For its health and rejuvenation, Yoga recommends Pratyahara (mental withdrawing of the senses,) to keep the mind calm and balanced. Pratyahara trains the body to withdraw from negative senses like wrong food, impressions, feelings and wrong associations. Pratyahara thus strengthens the mind's immunity to reject negative influences. Just as a healthy body resists toxins and pathogens, a healthy mind starts rejecting whatever is negative for the mind. There are four main forms of pratyahara: Indriya-pratyahara—control of the senses; karma-pratyahara-control of action; prana-pratyahara-control of prana; and mano-pratyahara—withdrawal of mind from the senses. Each has its special methods. Visualization is one of the simplest forms of pratyahara because it clears the mind of all negativity and creates a foundation for positive thoughts. Pratyahara practices help us extricate ourselves from the momentum of life in general and other influences and helps us find peace and serenity within us creating a heightened self-awareness and inner strength and prepares the individual for tapping his higher levels of consciousness.

VIJNANAMAYA KOSHA

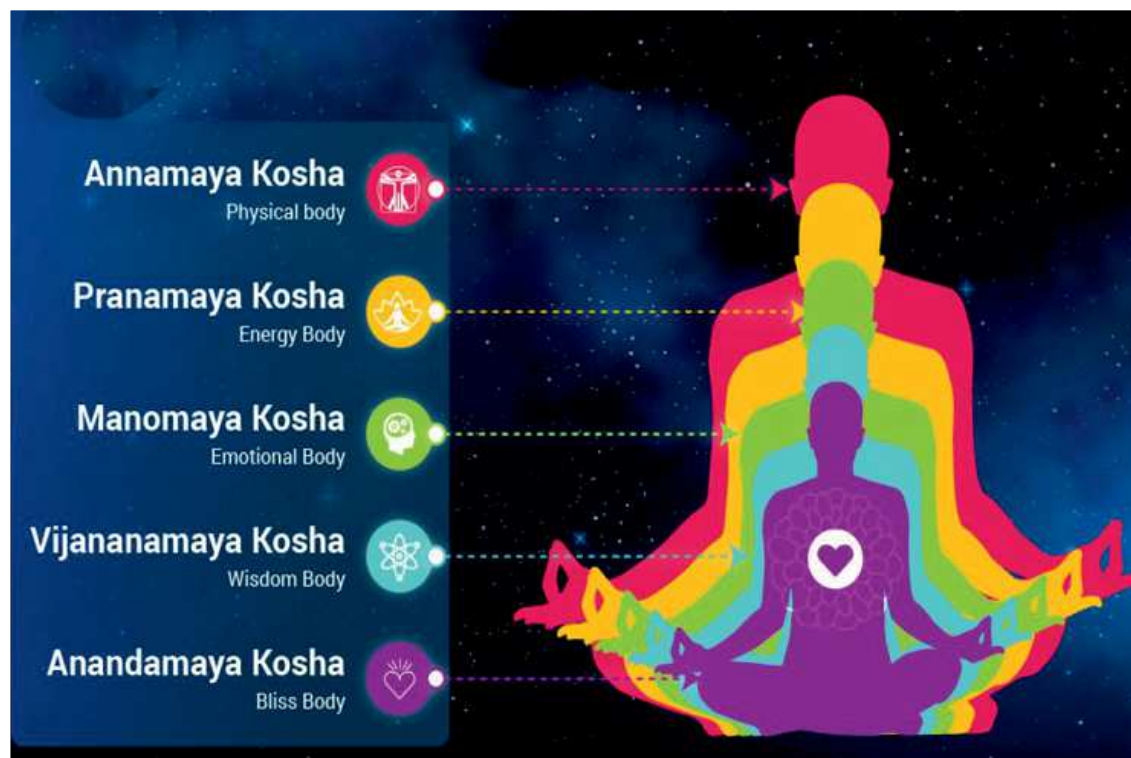
The word 'Vijnana' means wisdom. This aspect of ourselves helps us understand life and its elements at the deepest. Working on this sheath helps us receive messages form the deepest levels of our understanding as we get closer and closer to the ultimate truth of the Atman which is the purest and hence the wisest. Yoga recommends Dharana, a deep concentrative meditation practice of getting the mind to focus and hold concentration on a single point or object excluding everything else, to strengthen this kosha. This trains the mind to be static enabling it to see clearly by getting in touch with the absolute truth. It helps the individual to tap into the higher levels of consciousness which refines our understanding and wisdom in sync with the universal reality. No wonder we were always told to 'think clearly'! This single focus cures the inner conflicts that disturb us and brings peace and mindfulness. A peaceful mind has a greater ability to tap into our inner wisdom.

ANANDAMAYA KOSHA

The word 'Ananda' means bliss. This is the spiritual sheath where you are the closest to striking the right spark or connection with the unequivocally pure 'atman' or soul. This sheath is activated when our conscious is connected to the unconscious mind. This is the highest vibration when you reach 'Mukti' or liberation. This is when the self becomes one with the soul. This is a state of eternal bliss, a state where the self is free of all attachments and desires. This is where the recommended 'dhyana' has reached the meditative stage. Very few are able to tap into this kosha and attain Samadhi or the ultimate liberation. The ones who do are seen as saints and evolved souls.

At Carnoustie, we believe that a good understanding of the Koshas helps individuals seek a guru who understands each individual's unique interplay of koshas and helps customize a yoga regimen for balancing these koshas for better physical, psychological and spiritual health goals.

Focusing on just the asanas (postures) can only have limited physical benefits. We need to understand that Yoga is not a “ONE FIT FOR ALL” physical exercise but an extremely refined mind-body-soul concept and needs to be followed in the right spirit. Physical fitness is of very little value if the mind and the higher realms of consciousness are unhealthy. For e.g. there are famous personalities who have picture perfect physical attributes and yet suffer from depression. We need to appreciate that a healthy mind cannot live in an unhealthy body and vice versa. This reinforces Carnoustie's emphasis on personalization of Wellness.



ANNAMAYA KOSHA - the physical sheath

The term Annamaya kosha is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Anna' which means food. Annamaya Kosha is the outermost sheath of the five koshas described in the Upanishads. This sheath is nothing but our physical body comprising of our skin, tissue, muscles, organs and bones. It represents the earth element and hence is the most dense and sturdiest amongst the five koshas. It is extremely important to keep this kosha healthy as it shelters and encompasses all the other Koshas. That is why the saying that a “healthy mind is essential for a healthy mind and a blissful soul”. After all it is this sheath or kosha that houses the immortal soul.

According to ancient texts, this kosha can be kept healthy and free of toxins by eating nutritious food according to your body type and exercising regularly for which Yoga recommends various Asanas or postures. Hence the emphasis on good nutrition and regular exercise. However it is not as simple as that! There is an ancient saying that “one person’s nectar is another’s poison”! this indicates that we can’t follow a general approach to wellness .

This individualised approach to dietary habits and physical wellness was emphasised in the the ancient Ayurveda (a 5,000-year-old medical philosophy and practice- the oldest known to man)texts. According to them, all human beings are made of different types and combination of energy and elements /doshas which determines the body type. There are principally three doshas in Ayurveda - , Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. All the three are found in all human beings in varying proportions which is predetermined at birth itself. The key is to work and eat to balance these three doshas to keep the Annamaya or the physical kosha healthy. An imbalance in these doshas causes sickness, both physical and mental.

Ayurveda principles believe that identifying your dosha type is essential for leading a healthy life as one is able to plan one’s nutrition and fitness regimen accordingly, further reinforcing that is there is ‘no one fit for all’ in Ayurveda. This is in contrast with modern western concepts that prescribe diets according to their nutrition to all people. This is also one of the reasons for increase in ailments like obesity, IBS, arthritis, diabetes, insomnia, anxiety and mental stress and respiratory ailments across the world. For example the vata or the air dominant type is recommended warm nourishing food with clarified butter –ghee and excess dairy which is not good for the pitta or the fire dominant type and kapha the earth dominant type! On the same note, cold salads are good for the pitta type and need to be avoided by the vata lot and to be consumed in moderation by the kapha type. At Carnoustie, our Ayurvedic specialists recommend diet plans after identifying the body type and this ensures a healthy and toxin free Annamaya Kosha.

Besides eating right, exercising is equally essential to keep the physical kosha healthy. Yoga prescribes different asanas . Unfortunately, yoga was lapped up by the world as an exercise regimen and ‘one fit for all’ yoga studios mushroomed across the world. That is not ‘true Yoga’ according to the ancient texts. Yoga asanas also need to be prescribed keeping in mind the Dosha or body type to produce optimum results. Yoga also recommends kriyas (internal cleansing) to keep the Annmaya kosha toxin free. If yoga is done as an exercise regimen alone without the guidance of a well-informed Guru and Ayurveda concepts, the same asanas can leave a person feeling depleted and even more agitated. Ignorance of this crucial element was responsible for many being disappointed with concepts like the much hyped ‘Power Yoga’, which did cause fat loss but also increased anxiety levels in many.

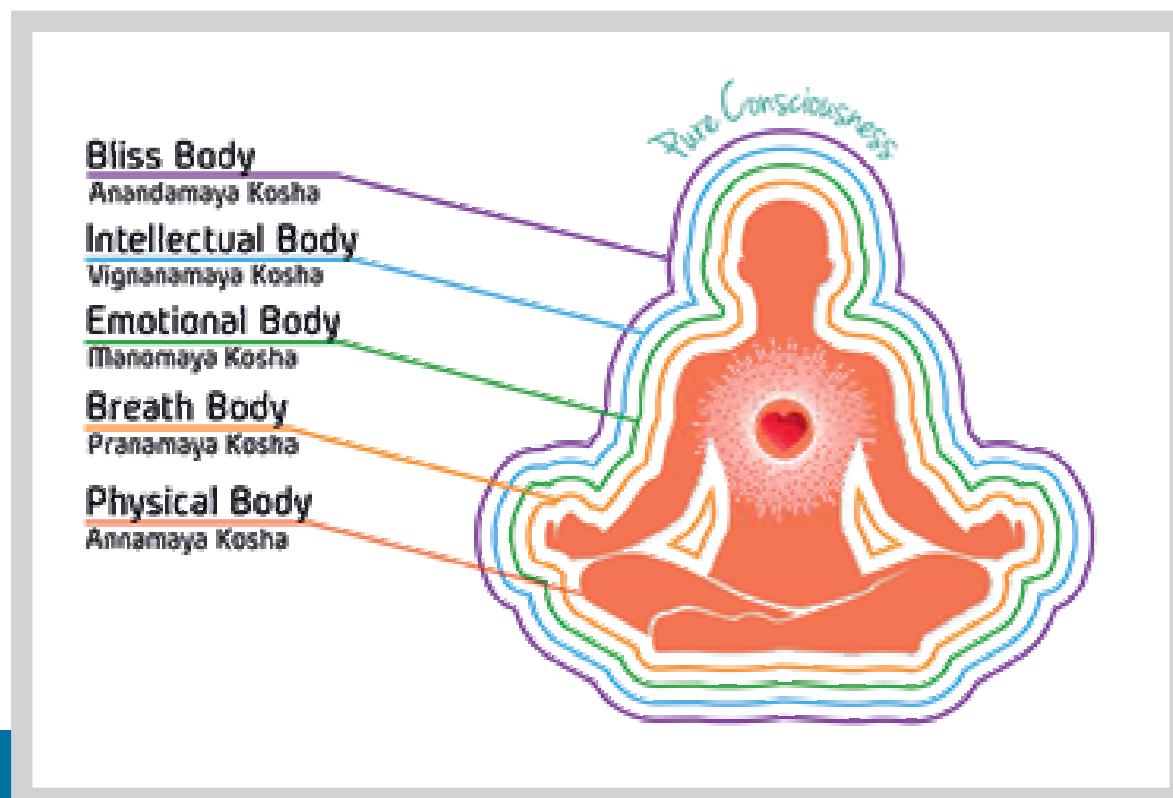
Persons with a dominant vata should practice Yoga which are calming and generate fire in the digestive system such as the Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend), Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose), Tadasana (Mountain Pose), Vrksasana (Tree Pose), Malasana (Garland Pose), Dandasana (Staff Pose) , Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose), Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend), Upavistha Konasana (Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend), Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) Padmasana (Lotus Pose) , Savasana (Corpse Pose) to name a few. These asanas are calming and focus on the abdomen and lower back and body where vata has a negative effect. Moreover, people with a predominant vata aslo have more fragile muscular and bone frame hat needs to kept in mind when formulating a Yoga routine.

The Pitta or the fire dominant type need to have a routine that is calming and doesn't over heat the body. The focus for Pitta types is on calming the fire element and not fanning it. Asanas that focus on the solar plexus and the small intestine and work on strengthening the the liver and the spleen are very beneficial for the Pitta dosha type. The Asanas beneficial for the Pitta type are Ustrasana (Camel Pose) , Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) and Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) , Sukhasana (easy pose). Marjaryasana-Bitilasana (Cat-Cow), Balasana (Child's Pose), Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog), Utthita Trikonasana(Extended Triangle Pose), Janu Sirsasana(Head-to-Knee Forward Bend) to name a few.

The Kapha dominant person, on the other hand needs asanas that energise, stimulate and generate heat to help them overcome their inherent sluggishness. Since kapha stays in the chest (lungs)and the stomach, yoga asanas focussing on these two areas are very useful. Ustrasana (Camel Pose) and Setu Bandha (Bridge Pose), Suryanamaskar (Sun Salutation), Tadasana(Mountain Pose) Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend), Adho Mukha Svanasana(Downward-Facing Dog), Virabhadrasana (Warrior pose) are some sasanas recommended for the Kapha type.

It does not end here. The true practitioners also keep in mind the season and the general weather conditions as they have a direct impact on the doshas. For example cold weather aggravates the kapha, summer aggravates the pitta and autumn aggravates the Vata.

It is thus imperative that no 'one blanket' approach be applied to both, a healthy diet and Yoga asanas for maintaining the Annamya Kosha. Mindful of this, the team at Carnoustie takes great pains to personalize the treatments and dietary recommendations, checking the progress at regular intervals to ensure that the doshas remain in balance to keep the outermost protective kosha in good health.



PAWANMUKTASANA SERIES - the ideal Yoga stretching and prepping

Gone are the days when creaky aching knees, hips, wrists and ankles were seen as signs of advancing age. None of these conditions are considered a big deal anymore with an increasing number of teenagers, avid texters and candy crush or other video gaming addicts making rounds of clinics and physiotherapists to treat their 'text claws' – term for a painful thumb! Elbow tendinopathies owing to excessive hours spent on the computer and hand-arm vibration syndrome related to extreme video gaming and overuse of cellular phones are becoming common parlance. Doctors warn that these conditions can lead to severe arthritis and other ailments if not treated and have now started warning people to rethink their sedentary lifestyles and unbridled overdependence on technology. Add to this, is the dismal report of a vast majority of people across the world reportedly being addicted to over-the-counter drugs for their pain which in turn have numerous side effects.

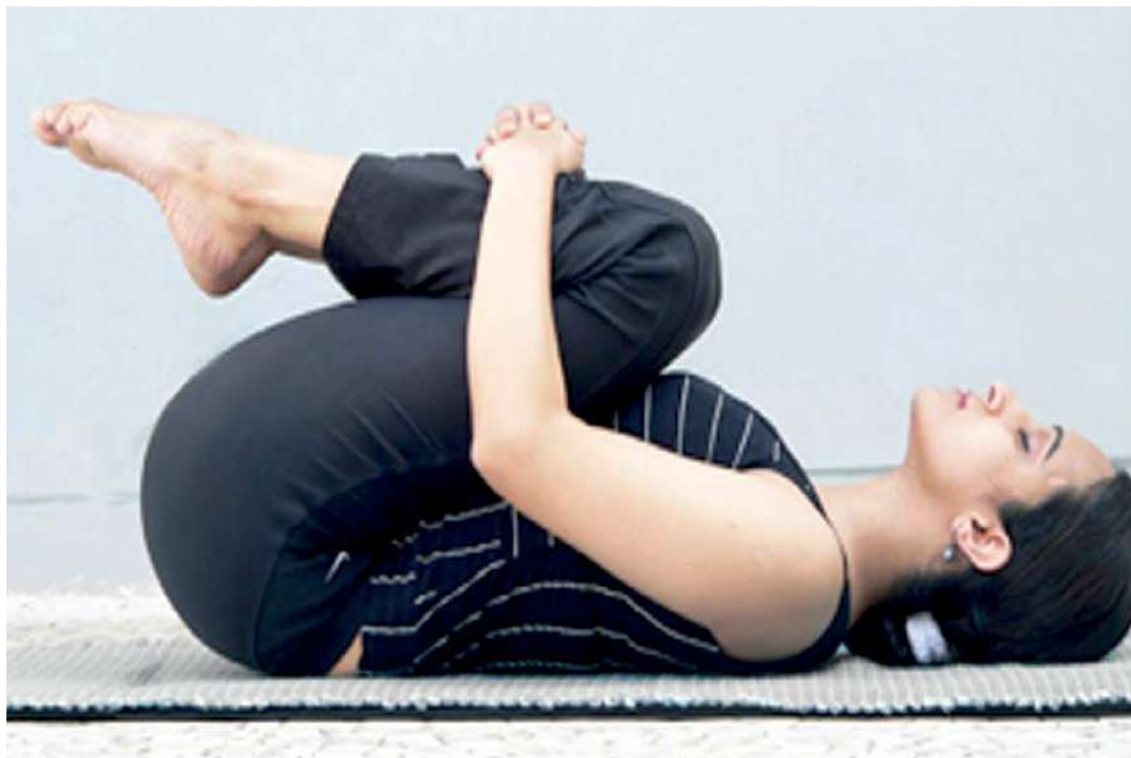
The yoga gurus at Carnoustie suggest a combination of Yoga and Ayurvedic treatments to live a healthy life devoid of pain of any kind. The Pawanmuktasana series – part 1 is a good start in reducing regular aches and pains. The Sanskrit term Pawanmuktasana is composed of three words Pawan – meaning wind, Mukta – meaning release or freedom and asana meaning pose. This series is a set of asanas that releases all wasteful gas in the body which causes blockages in the free flow of prana or vital life force in the body causing discomfort and pain. The joints and the ligaments and muscles around them are an intricate and complex part of the body where this free flow of prana is impeded the fastest resulting in rheumatic pains and other disorder which in turn lead to other complications because movement is restricted. Many becoming obese in the process. Thus removing this blockages and allowing a free flow of vital energy is essential. In an emotional and spiritual context, it is seen as a way of getting rid of all the emotions and negative thoughts that impede our thinking and spiritual growth and mental peace.

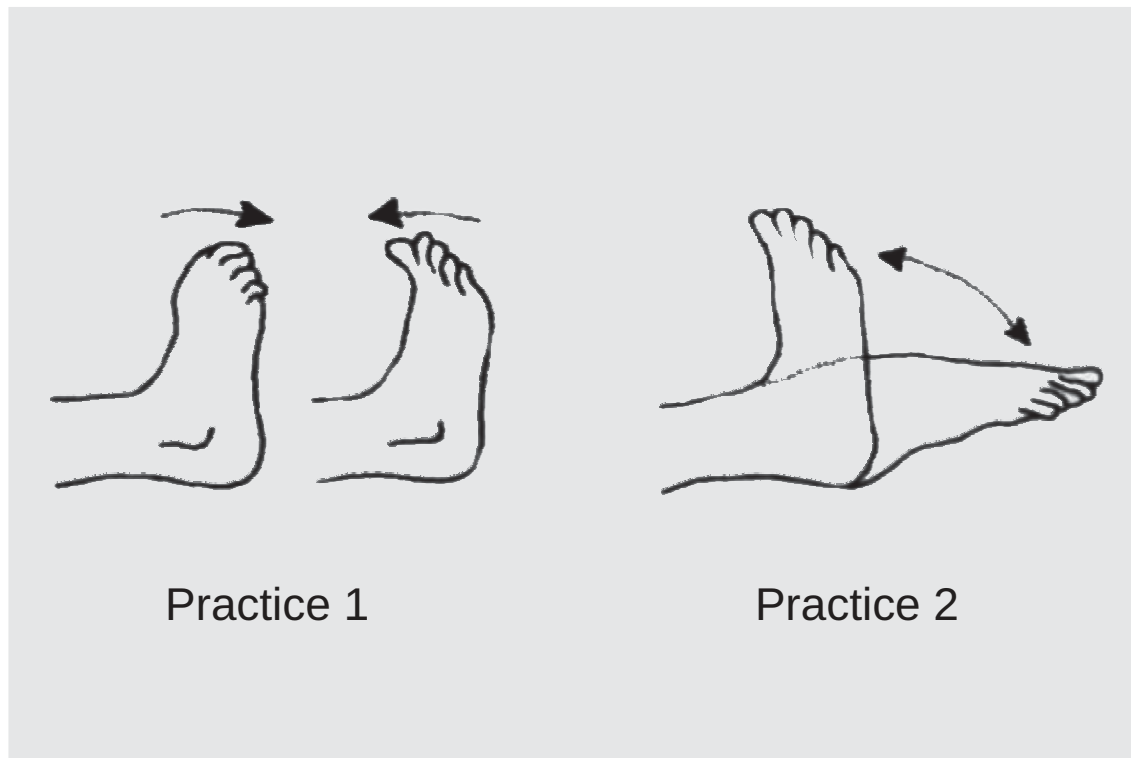
The Pawanmuktasana has three series; first works on relaxing the joints, the second works on revitalising and improving the digestive system which is the source of all nutrients and the third works on improving the energy flow within the body. Here we will focus on the part 1 series. Pawanmuktasana Series Part 1 is a set poses or asanas that focus on relaxing the joints by eliminating energy blockages which cause pain. These are very useful for people suffering from rheumatism, arthritis, high blood pressure, heart problems or other ailments that prevents them from doing anything strenuous.

It is important to note that these asanas are not about movement alone. They are a lesson in mindfulness and self-awareness. Each small movement is done with complete awareness according importance to the part of the body being healed by gently releasing movements. It is also advised to exercise synchronized breathing with each physical movement to enhance the sense of self awareness and tranquillity. Importance is also given to breath control and when done appropriately under the watchful eye of a guru, he/she may help the practitioners incorporate ujjayi pranayama to it to balance and revitalise the energy flow into the part of the body that is being worked on. The gurus recommend a resting period between each set where the practitioner is advised to sit calmly with the eyes gently shut and are asked to focus on their breathing which makes them more mindful of their own internal energy patterns and dynamics, reducing anxiety and stress levels which are normally heightened due to the ailments.

This series has the following benefits:

- These subtle asanas regulate the flow and circulation of the synovial fluid to the joints making them supple.
- They strengthen and revitalise the muscles that support the movement of the joints
- They increase the tensile strength of the joints and its supporting muscles by allowing an unforced range of movement that doesn't happen otherwise in normal course.
- They enhance blood and lymph circulation in the region ensuring that the joints get the nutrition they need and are able to eliminate the toxins that accumulate in them with ease.
- The movements help in greater mindfulness of the relationship between tone of the muscles in control of posture and movement and the central nervous system, the nerve pathways and the different groups of muscles.
- They exercise all muscle groups - agonists, antagonists., synergistic muscles and the fixators (muscles that keep the body parts motionless and steady to give a base for movement to take place without losing balance) and brings harmony and better coordination between them.
- They enhance the body - mind connection, bringing greater focus and control over one's movements and breath thus preparing the practitioner for a more strenuous Yoga regimen.
- Improve control of the body, understand the body, and we get ready for classical asanas, to derive full benefit from them.





Practice 1

Practice 2

PADANGULI NAMAN (TOE BENDING)

Sit comfortably with the back straight the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance slightly apart. Place the hands a few inches behind the buttocks on either side and lean back slightly with the support of the arms. Pls be careful not to bend the back and keep the spine straight always. Now focus on your toes and move them backward and forward slowly, while keeping the foot upright and the ankles fixed. The movement should be restricted to the toes with the feet being motionless. You might here the clicking sound of the toe cartilage which is a good sign as it loosens the joints. You can also breathe in rhythm with the movement; inhaling as the toe moves backward and exhaling as you press the toes forward. Repeat 10-15 times.

Benefits:

- Increases the mobility, reduces stiffness of the joints and foot pain.

Caution:

- Persons suffering from Arthritis should not make any forced movement. Stop the bend where it starts being painful.

Refer Practice 1

GOOLF NAMAN (ANKLE BENDING)

Sit comfortably with the back straight the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance slightly apart. Place the hands a few inches behind the buttocks on either side and lean back slightly with the support of the arms. Pls be careful not to bend the back and keep the spine straight always. Focus on the feet and move them backward and forward. Pls note that the bending comes from the ankle joints without moving the heel. When you bend the feet forward try reaching as close to the floor as possible and when backward stretch them as much as you can towards the knee. You can also breathe in rhythm with the movement; inhaling as the foot moves backward and exhaling as you press the foot forward. Repeat 10 times.

- It stretches the calves and the hamstrings and strengthens the knees and the pelvic area.
- It helps in treating ailments of the Prostrate and relieving lower back pain.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle, knee, hamstring and spinal injuries.
- There should be no forced bending or movement

Refer Practice 2

GOOLF GHOORNAN (ANKLE CRANK)

Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance slightly apart. Bend the right knee and bring the right foot toward the left buttock, gently placing the foot on the left thigh as shown in figure. There should be no jerky movements. Once the foot is comfortable placed keep it slightly upright and grasp the ankle with the supporting right hand and clasp the toes with the left hand. Now with slightly force of the left hand slowly rotate the clasped foot 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise. Once done, repeat the same motion with the left foot on the right thigh. Keep the second leg straight and outstretched throughout and the spine straight. Always inhale on the upward rotation and exhale on the downward movement.

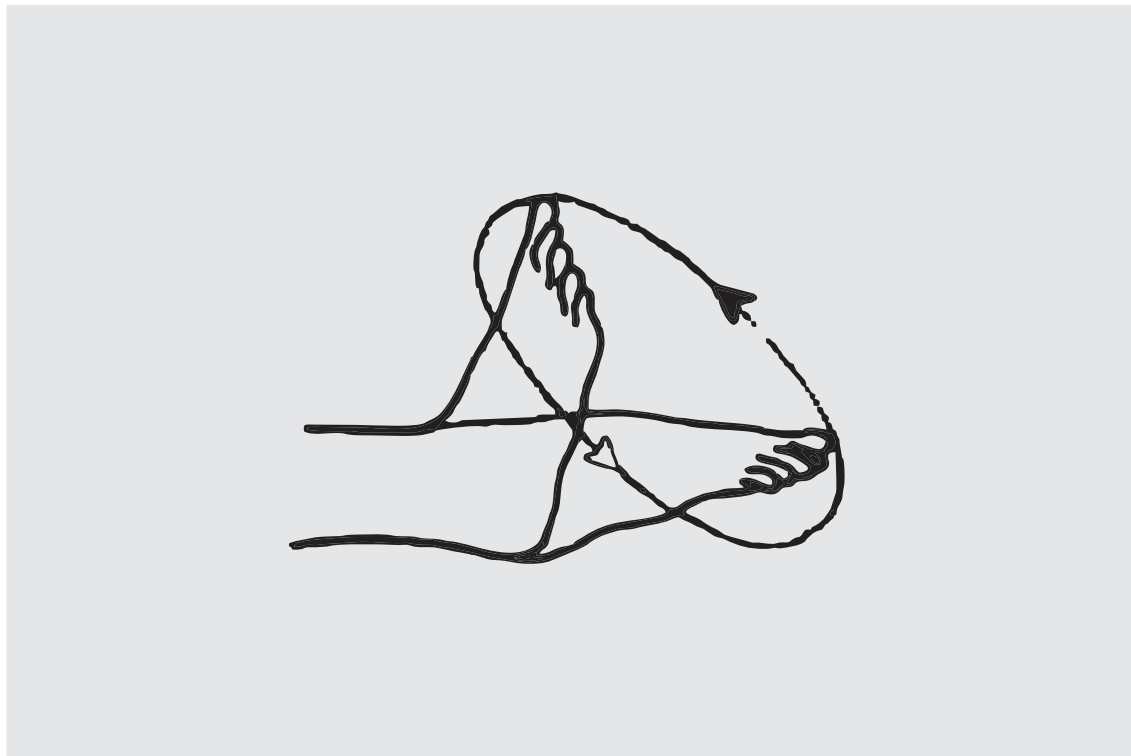
Benefits:

- It reduces the tightness in the pelvic area.
- Gives the ankles and the knees a good stretch and eases leg cramps.
- Helps in easing pain and discomfort caused by deep vein thrombosis.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle, knee, hamstring and spinal injuries
- There should be no forced bending or movement.





GOOLF CHAKRA

Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance slightly apart. Bend the right knee and bring the right foot toward the left buttock, gently placing the foot on the left thigh as shown in figure. There should be no jerky movements. Once the foot is comfortable placed keep it slightly upright and grasp the ankle with the supporting right hand and clasp the toes with the left hand. Now with slightly force of the left hand slowly rotate the clasped foot 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise. Once done, repeat the same motion with the left foot on the right thigh. Keep the second leg straight and outstretched throughout and the spine straight. Always inhale on the upward rotation and exhale on the downward movement.

Benefits:

- It reduces the tightness in the pelvic area.
- Gives the ankles and the knees a good stretch.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle or knee or hamstring injuries.
- There should be no forced bending or movement.
- Should be avoided by people suffering from spinal ailments.

JANU NAMAN (KNEE BENDING)

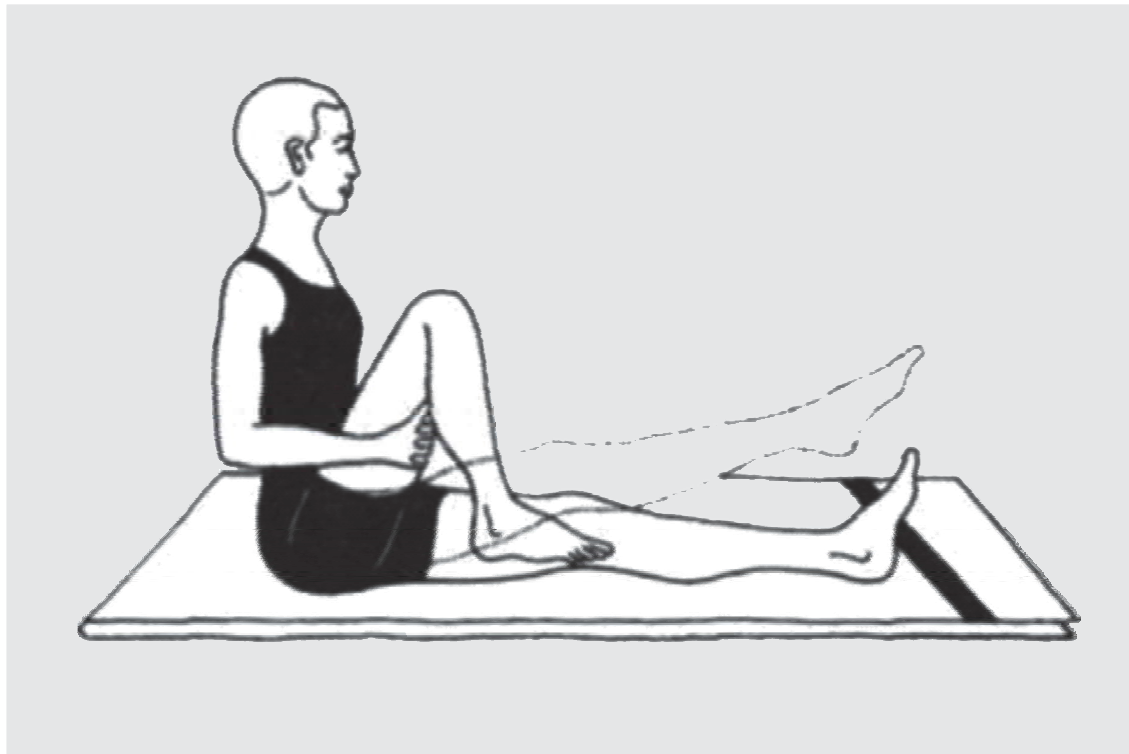
Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance slightly apart. Bend the right knee and bring the foot closer to the buttock on the same side. Clasp the leg under the thigh and hold for a few seconds and then slowly straighten the leg keeping it slightly raised and then gently lower to the ground. Make sure that the head and the spine remain in a straight line. Repeat ten times with each leg. Stay focused on the movement and Inhale while straightening the leg outward and Exhale while bending the leg towards the torso. You can deepen the stretch by clasping the lower shin instead of the thigh and the knee can be pushed closer to the chest with a light pressure without hurting the knee.

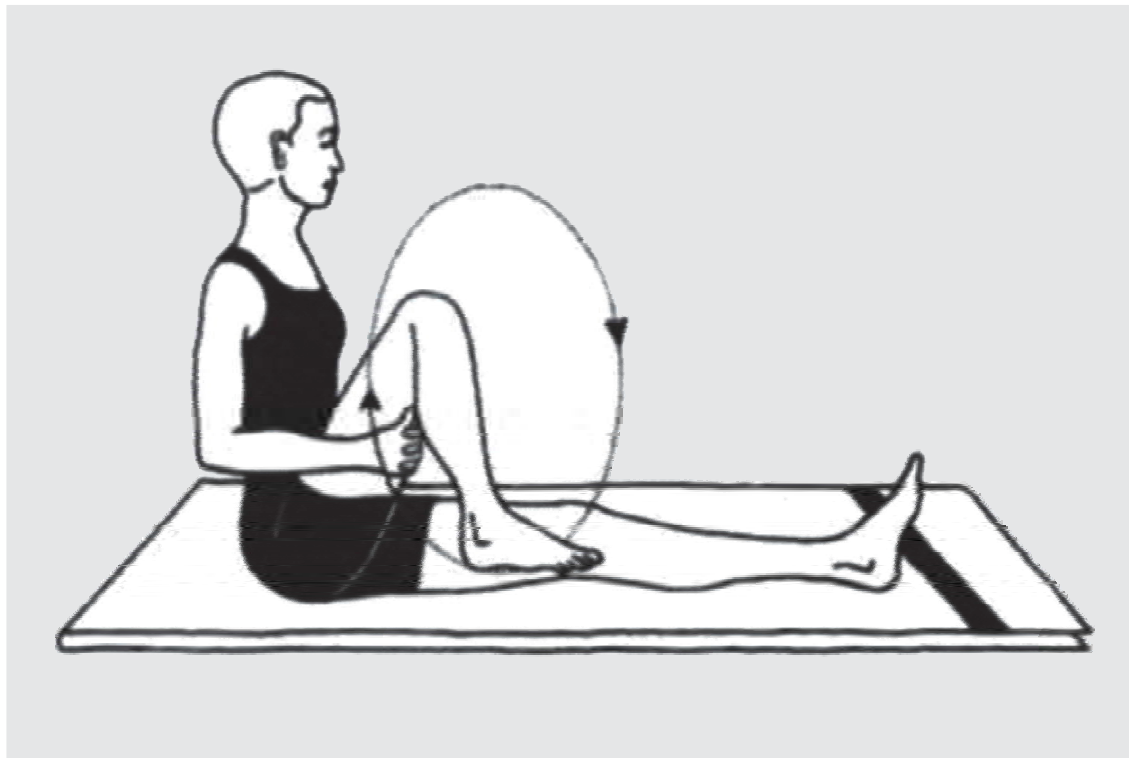
Benefits:

- It improves the flexibility of the ligaments.
- Helpful to relax tight hamstrings.
- Eases the pelvic area.
- It is also helpful in preventing osteoporosis.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle or knee or hamstring injuries.
- There should be no forced bending or movement.
- Should be avoided by people suffering from spinal ailments.





JANU CHAKRA (KNEE CRANK)

Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance slightly apart. Bend the right knee and bring the foot closer to the buttock on the same side. Clasp the leg under the thigh and interlock the fingers to maintain a firm clasp. Gently and slowly raise the right foot from the ground and rotate the lower leg from the knee in a large circular movement. Make an effort to straighten the leg during the peak of the upward movement. Make sure that the spine and the neck remain straight and the body remains immobile. The other leg should remain outstretched straight. Rotate 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise. Gently bring the leg down and repeat with the left leg. Inhale on the upward movement and exhale on the downward movement.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the quadriceps and the ligaments that support the knee joint.
- Strengthens the knees.
- Improves flexibility and ease of movement.
- Improves the balance in the body.
- Reduces tension in the pelvic area.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle or knee or hamstring injuries.
- There should be no forced bending or movement.
- Should be avoided by people suffering from spinal ailments.

ARDHA TITALI ASANA (HALF BUTTERFLY)

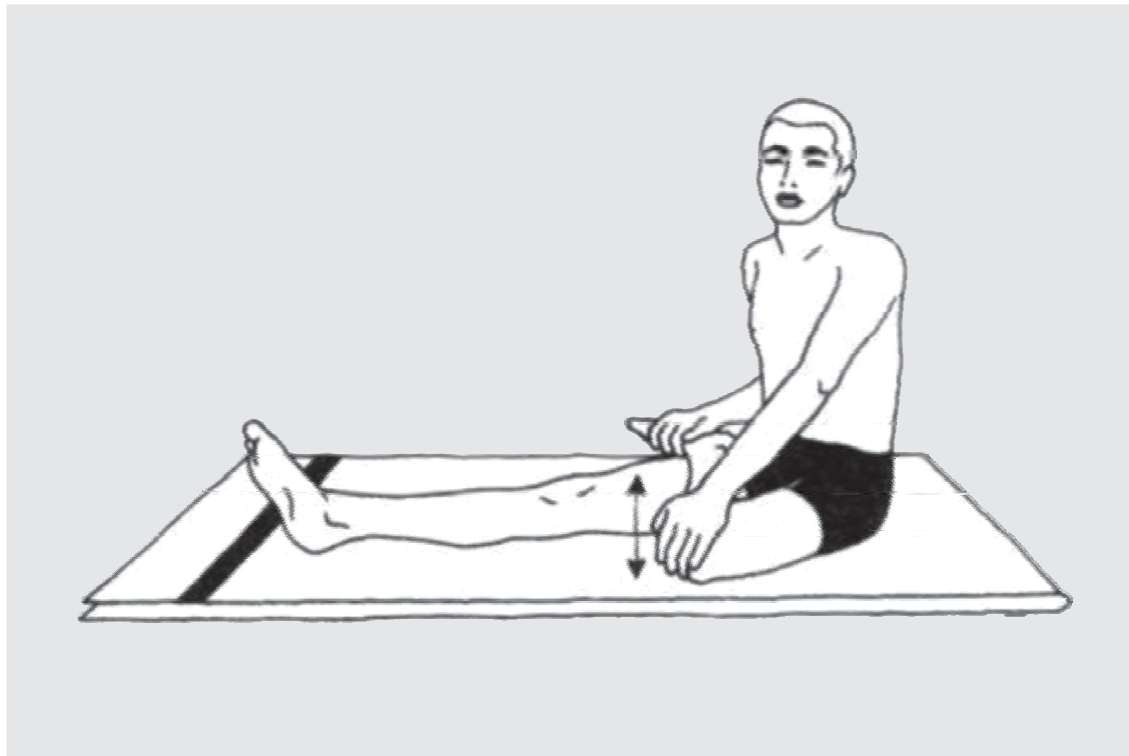
Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance apart. Bend the right leg and place the right foot as far up on the left thigh as possible. Place the right hand on top of the bent right knee and clasp the toes of the right foot with the left hand. Now while inhaling gently lift the right knee about six inches up with support from the right hand and then exhaling gently push the knee down and try to touch the knee to the floor. None of this movement should be forced or it will hurt the knee. The spine should remain straight and the rest of the body should not move. Repeat the movement 10 times and then repeat with the left leg.

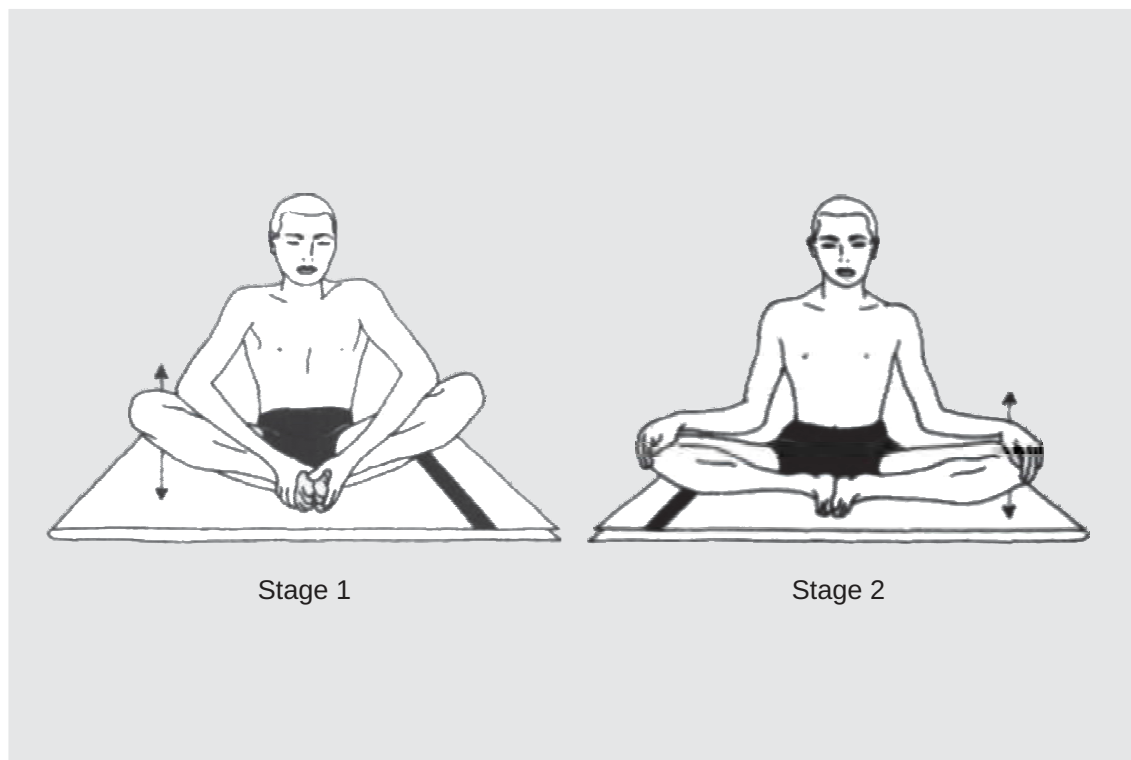
Benefits:

- It is a preparatory asana for relaxing and strengthening the knee and hip joints for meditative poses.
- It is especially beneficial for those persons who can't sit comfortably in cross-legged position.
- Increases flexibility of the knee region
- Helps to rejuvenate legs that tire out from long hours of standing or sitting

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle or knee or hamstring injuries.
- There should be no forced bending or movement.
- Should be avoided by people suffering from spinal ailments.





POORNA TITALI ASANA (FULL BUTTERFLY)

Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance apart. Bend the knees and bring the soles of the feet together, gently pushing the heels as close to the groin as possible. Do not use force. Clasp the feet with both hands also ensuring that the soles stay together. Gently move the knees up and down, using the elbows as levers to press the legs down. In the downward movement, try to get the knees to touch the ground. Repeat 30-60 times.

Benefits:

- It is an excellent preparatory practice to prepare the legs for meditative asanas.
- It reduces the tension in the inner thighs and stretches the pelvic area.
- It relaxes the legs and the hip area.
- It is especially beneficial for those persons who can't sit comfortably in cross-legged position.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people suffering from ankle or knee or hamstring injuries.
- There should be no forced bending or movement.
- Should be avoided by people suffering from spinal ailments.
- Should be avoided by pregnant and menstruating women.
- Should be avoided by person suffering from ailments of the prostate.

SHRONI CHAKRA (HIP ROTATION)

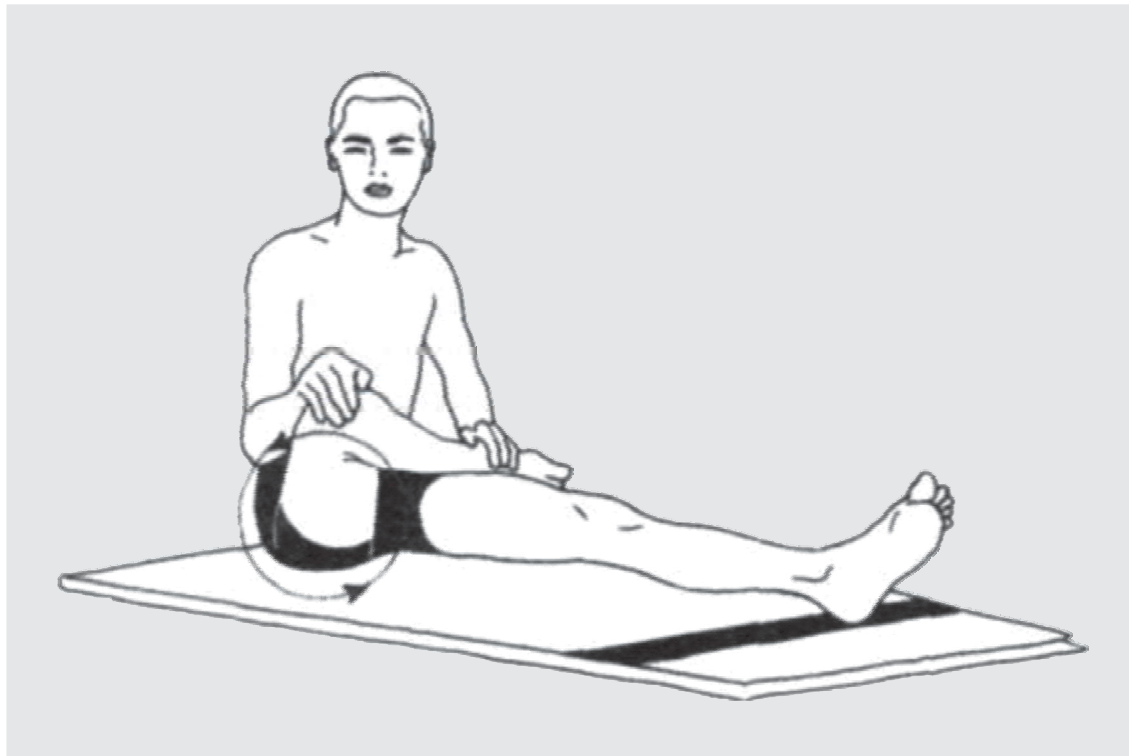
Sit comfortably with the back straight and the legs outstretched straight ahead and the feet shoulder distance apart. Bend the right leg and place the right foot as far up on the left thigh as possible. Place the right hand on top of the bent right knee and clasp the toes of the right foot with the left hand. Now while inhaling gently lift the right knee a little and gently rotate it in a circle. The right arm should provide support to the rotating knee. Try and make a large circle. Make 10 rotations clockwise and then 10 rotations anticlockwise. Release and straighten the knee without any jerk and then repeat the same with the left knee. Repeat the same with the left knee. The leg not in use always remains outstretched and the spine remains straight. Inhale in the upward movement and exhale in the downward movement.

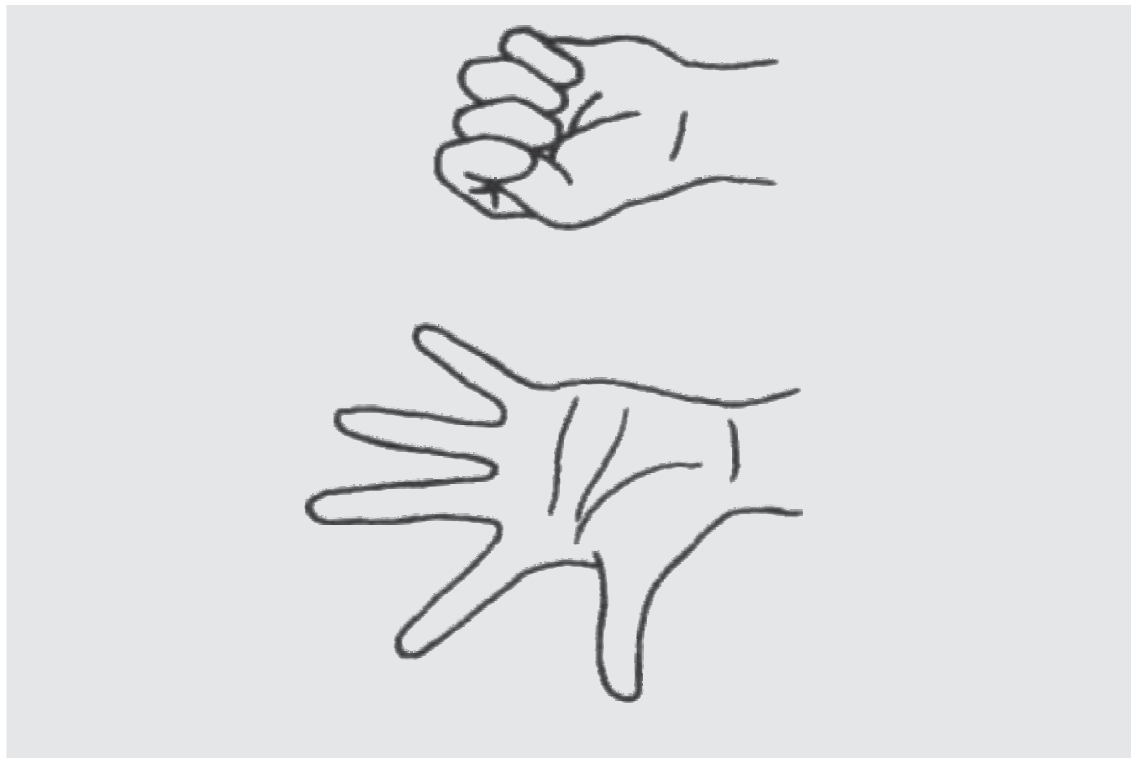
Benefits:

- It makes the hip joints more flexible and strengthens them.
- Removes strain in the hip and pelvic area.
- Eases the strain in the knee joints
- It is particularly useful for those who sit for long hours at work.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by Sciatica patients.
- There should be no forced or painful movement.
- People who have painful joints and spinal issues should practice this asana only after consulting with a trained Yoga instructor.





MUSHTIKA BANDHANA (HAND CLENCHING)

Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. Lift both the arms and stretch them out straight in front of the body at shoulder level. Open the hands and stretch the fingers as wide apart as possible as shown in image and then clench the fingers to make a tight fist with the thumbs inside. The fingers should be slowly enveloped around the thumbs. Repeat 10 times. Inhale when you open the grip and exhale when you hold in a tight fist.

Benefits:

- It helps relieve tension and stiffness in your wrists, hands, and fingers.
- It improves and strengthens the grip.
- It is very useful for those suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome.
- It also relaxes and reduces the tension in the arms.
- It is very useful for those who spend long hours working on the computer.
- It is very useful in providing relief to those suffering from arthritis, particularly osteoarthritis.

Caution:

- The movement should never be forced.
- People with stiff joints should be even more careful

MANIBANDHA CHAKRA (WRIST JOINT ROTATION)

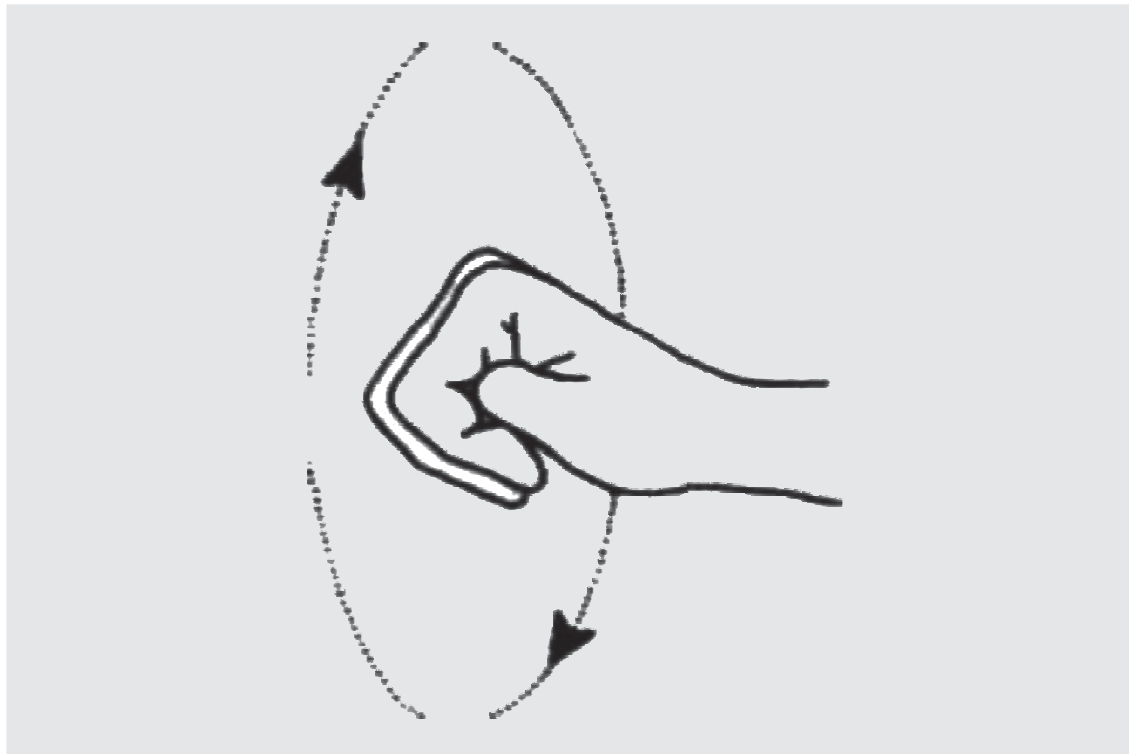
Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. Extend the right arm outward till shoulder level. Clench the right hand in a fist with the thumb pressed inside by the fingers. Now slowly rotate the fist from the wrist ensuring that the fist faces palm downward during the rotation. The arm and elbow should remain straight. An effort should be made to make as large a circle as possible. Rotate clockwise ten times and then anticlockwise 10 times. Gently open the fist and lower the arm and repeat with the left arm. Breathe normally throughout.

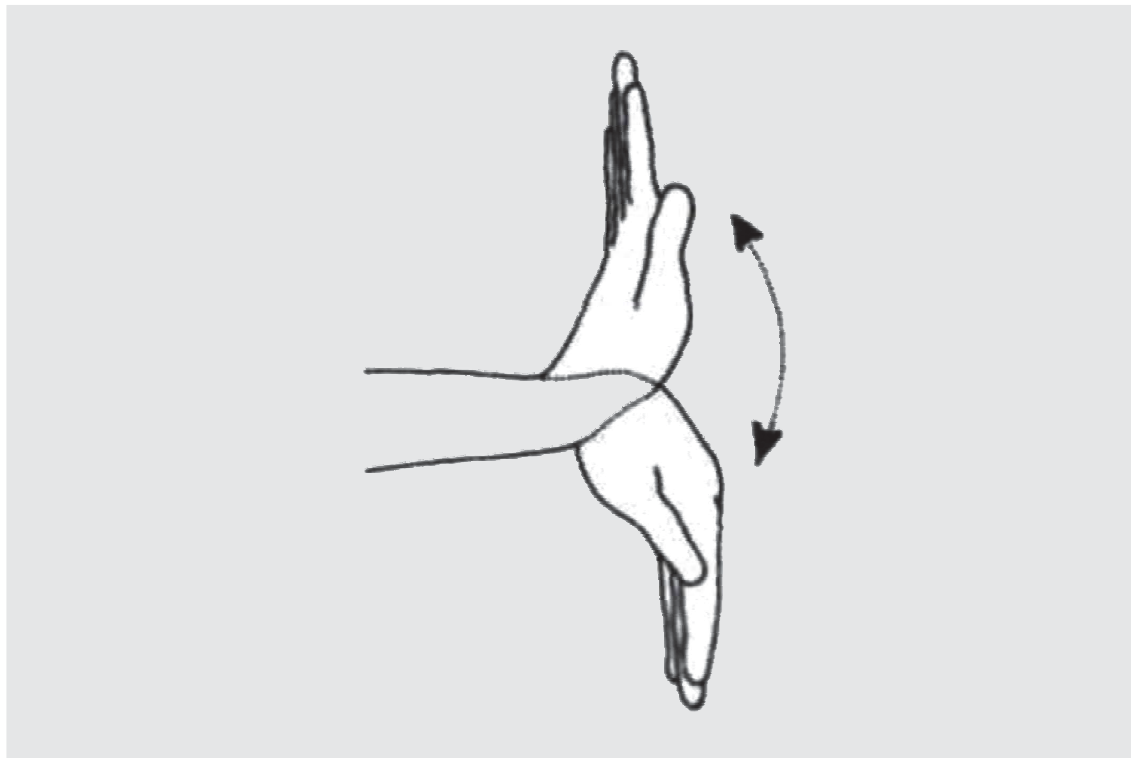
Benefits:

- It helps relieve tension and stiffness in the wrist area.
- It improves flexibility of the wrists
- It is very useful for those suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome.
- It is very beneficial for persons afflicted with arthritis.
- It helps relieve tension caused in the wrist area due to prolonged writing or typing.

Caution:

- The movement should never be forced.





MANIBANDHA NAMAN (WRIST BENDING)

Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. Extend the right arm outward till shoulder level. Clench the right hand in a fist with the thumb pressed inside by the fingers. Now slowly rotate the fist from the wrist ensuring that the fist faces palm downward during the rotation. The arm and elbow should remain straight. An effort should be made to make as large a circle as possible. Rotate clockwise ten times and then anticlockwise 10 times. Gently open the fist and lower the arm and repeat with the left arm. Breathe normally throughout.

Benefits:

- It relieves tension and stiffness in the fingers, hands and wrists.
- Improved grip strength.
- Helps those suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Improves the hand movement and reduces pain.
- It is particularly useful for all those who work on the computer for long hours.
- It makes the hand and wrist muscles more flexible.
- It provides relief in osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
- It helps reduce pain of tendonitis.

Caution:

- Do not make any forced or painful movement.
- Should be avoided by persons suffering from wrist and hand injuries.
- The movement should be smooth and not jerky.

ELBOW BENDING- (KEHUNI NAMAN)

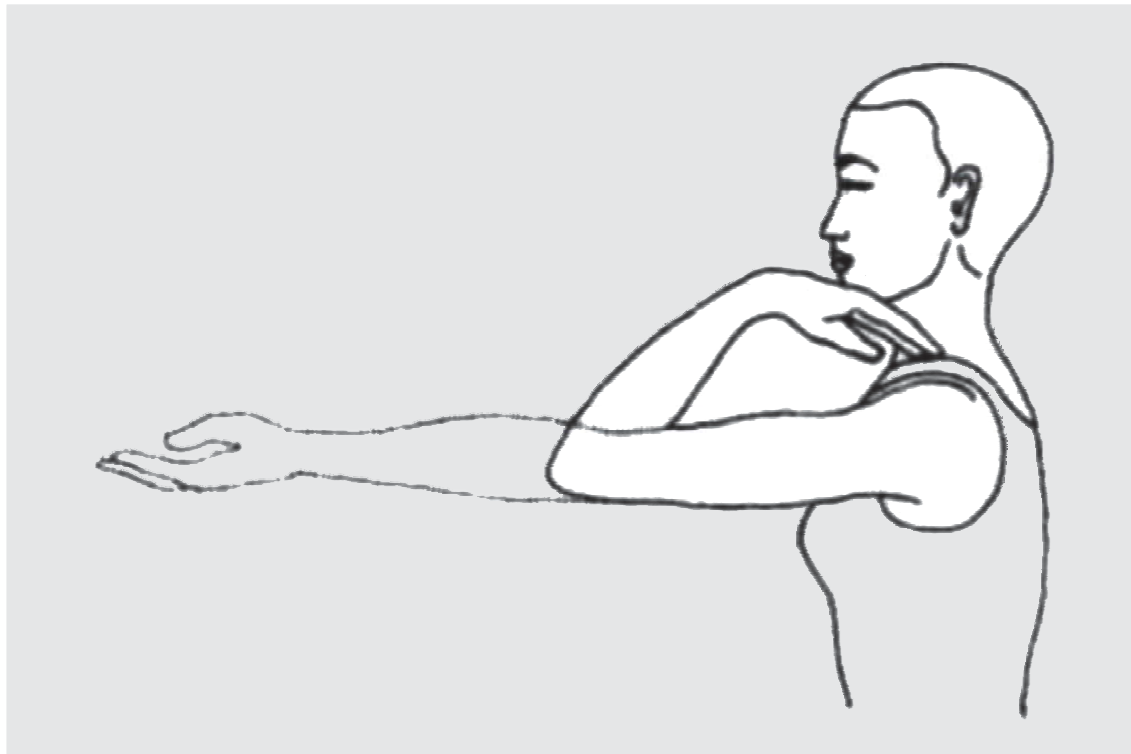
Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. Extend the arms out in front keeping them outstretched at the shoulder level. The hands should be open with the palms facing up and fingers pointing outwards. Bend the arms at the elbows and raise the lower arm and tap the shoulders with the fingers alternately between the left and the right arm. Repeat 10 times on either side. Please note that the same practice can be done by raising the arms sideways. Inhale while straightening the arms and exhale when you bend them. As you alternate arms, pls make sure that both the arms are kept parallelly raised at shoulder height throughout.

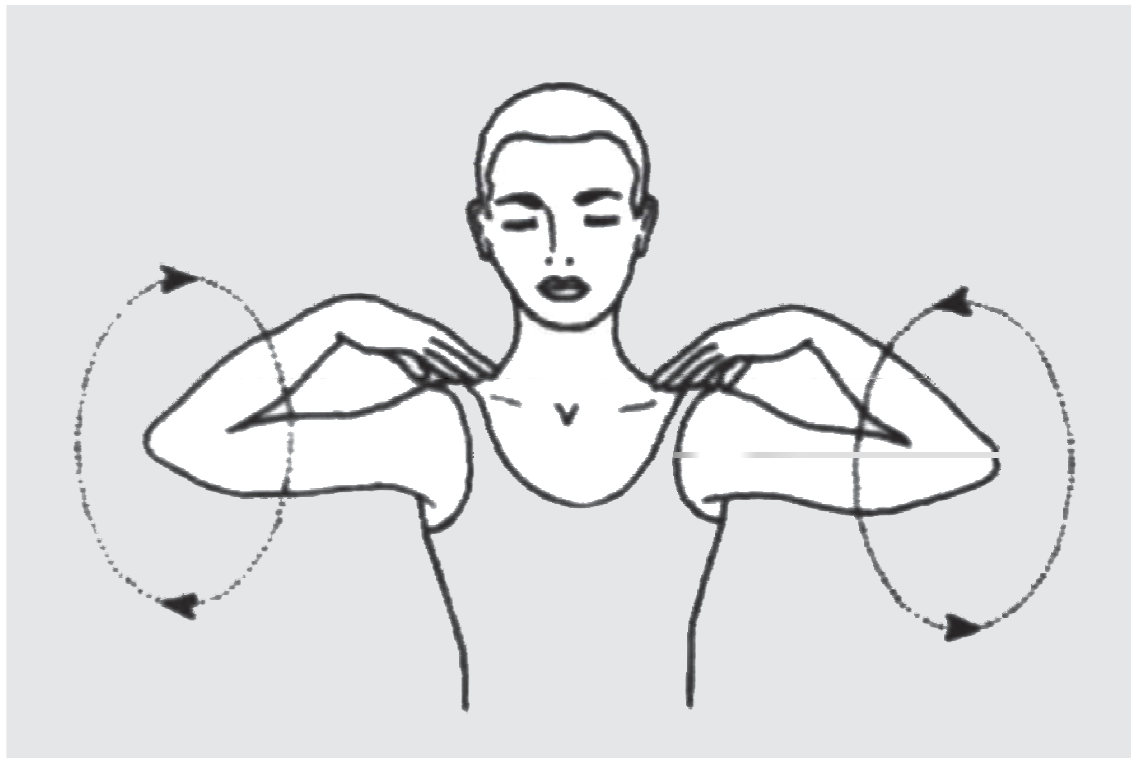
Benefits:

- It helps to relieve tension and stiffness in the elbows, hands & wrists.
- Useful for persons suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome.
- It improves and eases arm movement and strengthens the shoulder muscles.
- It is very useful for those who spend long hours working on the computer or typing.
- It helps provide relief in osteoarthritis

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from any arm or elbow or shoulder injury.
- The movement should not be forced and painful.
- The movement should be smooth and not forced and jerky.





SKANDHA CHAKRA (SHOULDER ROTATION)

Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. Place the fingers of the left hand on the left shoulder and the right hand on the right shoulder. Now rotate both the elbows at the same time in large circles, first clockwise and then anticlockwise. Repeat each 10 times. Try to touch the elbows to the chest on the forward movement, the ears lightly on the way up and the sides of the trunk on your way down. Inhale during the upward movement and exhale in the downward movement.

Benefits:

- It relieves shoulder pain and tension caused by driving and desk work.
- It gives relief in cervical spondylitis and frozen shoulder.
- It strengthens the shoulders and keeps the chest well aligned.
- It also reduces tension in the upper back.
- It is very useful for those who have desk jobs or spend a lot of time working on the computer.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from any arm or elbow or shoulder injury.
- The movement should not be forced and painful.
- The movement should be smooth.

GREEVASANCHALANA (NECK MOVEMENT)

First Routine

Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. rest the hands on the knees in in jnana or chin mudra and gently close the eyes. Slowly exhale and move the head forward trying to touch the chin to the chest and then inhale and move the head back as far as you can comfortably. Do not apply undue pressure or strain. Repeat 10 times.

Second Routine

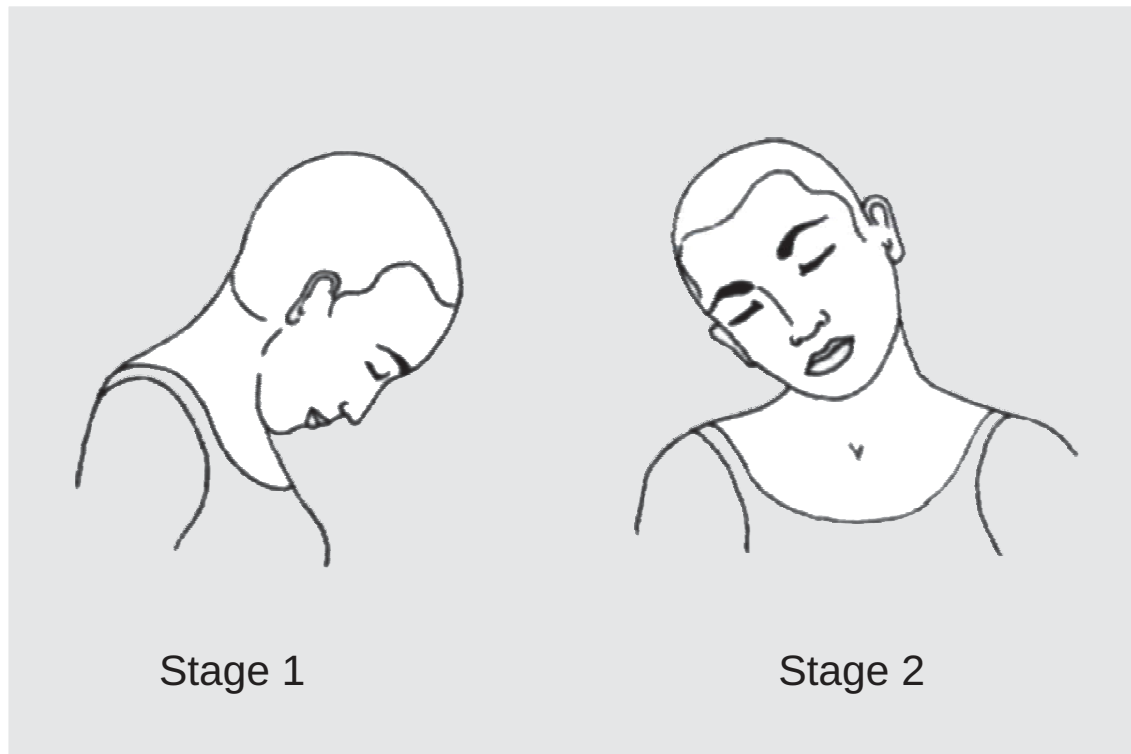
Sit comfortably in a cross-legged pose with the spine straight. rest the hands on the knees in in jnana or chin mudra and gently close the eyes. Look straight ahead and relax the shoulders keeping them away from your ears. Slowly tilt the head to the right and try to touch the right ear to the right shoulder without turning the head or raising the shoulders and then tilt the head to the left side and try to touch the left ear to the left shoulder. Do not strain. Tilt as much as you can without straining the neck muscles. Practice 10 rounds on each side. Exhale when you tilt the head downward and inhale when you bring the head back to the starting position.

Benefits:

- It strengthens and relaxes the muscles of the neck and the shoulders.
- Releases tension and stiffness in the neck and the upper shoulder and chest region caused by driving and desk work.
- It reduces neck pain and stiffness.

Caution:

- Should not be practiced by people having any neck or spinal ailments.
- Strictly to be avoided by cervical spondylitis patients.
- The movement should not be forced and painful.



Stage 1

Stage 2



YOGA FOR STRESS RELIEF

Both the Annamaya Kosha or the physical sheath and the Manomaya Kosha (explained in the subsequent chapters) is impacted by stress. Stress is an inexorable fallout of today's fast paced life style and has become an integral part of our lives. We cannot wish it away. Acknowledging its presence and then finding ways and means to control and ultimately eradicate it, would be a more practical approach. Chronic stress can take a heavy toll on our health and well-being and hence cannot be ignored. Yoga with its 5,000-year-old legacy seeks to balance and integrate all the visible and invisible layers of our life so that our body, mind, soul, intellect and spirit flow in harmony. Yoga means union; the union of body, mind and soul. When this union is achieved, our outer and inner world are in harmony and there is greater emotional stability and clarity of mind. It renews our mind and spirit and our every action is more thoughtful, calm and relaxed. The deep breathing techniques used in various yoga postures help in invoking the restorative functions of the body and reduce muscular and mental tension. It is now medically proven that Yoga practice reduces the levels of 'cortisol' - the stress hormone and help in combating stress and anxiety.



VAJRASANA

Vajrasana is a sitting asana derived from the Sanskrit words 'vajra' meaning seated and 'asana' meaning pose.

Instructions: Kneel down bending your knees and stretching your lower legs backward. Make sure that the bent legs are kept as close together as possible and the big toes touch each other. Gently lower your body and rest your buttocks on your heels and your thighs on your calf muscles. Place your hands on your knees and look straight ahead breathing calmly. The head and the spine should be kept straight and erect. Sit in this pose for as long as you want. Keep the focus on the breathing pattern while in the pose. You could keep the eyes shut to improve focus and to keep the mind calm.

Benefits:

- It improves digestion, reduces acidity and bloating and helps cure constipation.
- It strengthens the back and provides relief to patients suffering from lower back problems and sciatica.
- It strengthens and tones the pelvic muscles.
- It helps pregnant women in easing out their labor pains and also reduces menstrual cramps.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from knee or lower back injuries.
- Pregnant women should keep their knees slightly apart when they practice this asana so that they do not exert undue pressure on their abdomen.

MANDUKASANA

The name Mandukasana is derived from the Sanskrit word 'manduk' meaning frog and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit comfortably in Vajrasana and tightly close the fists of your hands. While clenching the fists, tuck your thumb inside the fingers. Exhale and bend forward from the hip area pressing the clenched fists on the navel. Hold the pose and also hold the breath for as long as you can. Do not inhale or breathe and keep looking straight as you hold the bent pose. Inhale and come back to starting position (Vajrasana). Repeat three to four times.

Benefits:

- It improves the functioning of the digestive system and the excretory system and helps in the removal of toxins.
- It regulates and increases insulin secretion and hence is very good for diabetics.
- It reduces extra fat from the waist, thighs and hips.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from abdominal injuries and any kind of back pain or knee injuries.





ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘adhas’ meaning ‘down’, ‘mukha’ meaning face, ‘svana’ meaning dog and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Go on your fours into a table top position. Exhale and gently lift your hips straightening your elbows and knees and pushing the chest towards the thighs and drawing the abdomen into the rib cage till such time the body forms an inverted ‘V’. Make sure your hands stay in line with your shoulders and your feet in line with your hips. The toes should point inwards. Press your hands firmly into the ground. The neck should be kept long between the stretched arms. Your ears should touch your inner side of the arms and the gaze should be fixed on the navel. Hold the pose for 30-40 seconds. Make sure that the spine remains straight and does not curve while doing or holding the pose. Breathe calmly while holding the pose. Gently go back to the table top and repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It improves circulation throughout the body.
- It strengthens and tones the abdominal muscles and improves digestion and elimination.
- It massages the internal organs.
- It provides relief from anxiety and stress.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you suffer from high blood pressure, eye ailments, carpal tunnel syndrome, shoulder and wrist injuries.

BHUJANGASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bhujanga' meaning snake and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach with the hands placed on the sides and with your feet and heels lightly touching each other. Place your hands, palm downwards under the shoulders with the elbows firmly tucked close to/into the torso while keeping the navel on the floor. Now, placing your body's weight on your palms, inhale and raise your head and trunk. Note that your arms should be bent at your elbows when the body is raised. The neck should be arched upwards and backwards, the shoulder blades should be firm and held away from the ears. Make sure you put equal pressure on both your palms. This position can be held for 15-20 counts and then lowered while exhaling to the original position. One can do an advanced raise by straightening the arm and arching the back as much as possible. Breathing out, gently bring your abdomen, chest and head back to the floor.

Benefits:

- It tones the abdomen and strengthens the spine, back and shoulders.
- It improves flexibility of the upper and middle back.
- It expands the chest and lungs and gives the shoulders and abdomen a good stretch.
- It improves blood circulation and stimulates the digestive, reproductive and urinary systems.
- It reduces fatigue and stress.
- It provides relief from sciatica and asthma.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this asana if you are pregnant, have fractured ribs or wrists or have undergone any abdominal surgeries in the recent past.
- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from Carpel Tunnel Syndrome or have spinal disorders.





ARDHA BHEKASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bheka' meaning frog, 'asana' meaning posture and 'ardha' meaning half.

Instructions: Lie on your belly. Press your forearms against the floor and lift your head and upper torso. Bend your right knee and bring the heel toward the buttock of the same side. Clasp this foot with your right hand while supporting the raised body on your left forearm. The base of your right palm should be pressing the top of the right foot firmly into the right buttock. Turn the right elbow towards the ceiling. Be sure to keep your knee in line with your hip. Don't push your foot too hard if it hurts your knee. Keep your shoulders open and square and ensure that you do not bend towards the left arm or shoulder. Hold the posture for 30-60 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Do three to four sets.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the back and the spine.
- It relieves pain in the heels due to calcaneal spurs and in knees due to gout.
- It stimulates the organs of the abdomen and improves digestion.
- It stretches and rejuvenates the thorax, groin and the knee joints.
- It strengthens joints and muscles throughout the body.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by persons suffering from spinal or knee injuries.

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

The asana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath. The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'ardha' meaning half, 'matsya' meaning fish, 'indra' meaning king and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the feet together and the spine erect. Bend the left leg and place the heel of the left foot beside the right knee. Place the right hand on the raised left knee and the left hand behind you. You may keep the other leg straight or bend and tucked below the left buttock. Twist the waist, shoulders and neck in this sequence to the left and look over the shoulder. Keep the spine erect. Hold this asana for as long as you can (approx. 30-60 seconds and breathe in and out gently throughout). Breathing out, gently ease out of the asana. Repeat on the other side. Do at least 4 sets.

Benefits:

- It increases the elasticity of the spine, tones the spinal nerves and improves spinal strength.
- It massages the abdominal and other internal organs and improves digestion and elimination of wastes.
- It relaxes the hip joints relieving stiffness.
- It stimulates the Manipura chakra.
- It opens the chest and increases the oxygen supply to the lungs.
- It relieves symptoms of backache, fatigue, menstrual discomfort and sciatica.
- It stimulates the liver, heart, lungs, kidneys and spleen.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by women during pregnancy and menstruation.
- It should be avoided by people who have had heart, abdominal, spinal or vertebral surgeries and by people suffering from peptic ulcers or hernia.





BHUJANGASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bhujanga' meaning snake and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach with the hands placed on the sides and with your feet and heels lightly touching each other. Place your hands, palm downwards under the shoulders with the elbows firmly tucked close to/into the torso while keeping the navel on the floor. Now, placing your body's weight on your palms, inhale and raise your head and trunk. Note that your arms should be bent at your elbows when the body is raised. The neck should be arched upwards and backwards, the shoulder blades should be firm and held away from the ears. Make sure you put equal pressure on both your palms. This position can be held for 15-20 counts and then lowered while exhaling to the original position. One can do an advanced raise by straightening the arm and arching the back as much as possible. Breathing out, gently bring your abdomen, chest and head back to the floor.

Benefits:

- It tones the abdomen and strengthens the spine, back and shoulders.
- It improves flexibility of the upper and middle back.
- It expands the chest and lungs and gives the shoulders and abdomen a good stretch.
- It improves blood circulation and stimulates the digestive, reproductive and urinary systems.
- It reduces fatigue and stress.
- It provides relief from sciatica and asthma.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this asana if you are pregnant, have fractured ribs or wrists or have undergone any abdominal surgeries in the recent past.
- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from Carpel Tunnel Syndrome or have spinal disorders.

SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA

The term is derived from the Sanskrit words 'setu', meaning bridge, 'bandha' meaning lock, 'sarva' meaning all, 'anga' meaning limb and 'asana' meaning pose.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back with your arms placed on the sides palms facing downwards. Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor hip-width apart ensuring that the ankles and knees are placed in a straight line. Inhale and lift your back (lower, upper and middle) and the chest off the floor. Roll in your shoulders and make sure your chin touches your chest. Let your shoulders, feet and arms support your weight. Keep the buttocks squeezed firmly. The fingers can be interlaced and the clasped hand can be pressed firmly against the floor to help keep the torso raised. Hold the pose for 40-60 seconds. Breathe slowly and deeply as you hold the pose. Exhale and bring down the body slowly. Repeat the asana 4-5 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and stimulates the digestive system and forces elimination of toxins.
- It revitalizes the thyroid and the pituitary gland.
- It reduces depression, stress and anxiety and calms the brain.
- It provides relief from menstrual pain and symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, sinusitis, asthma, insomnia and osteoporosis.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from neck or spinal injuries and by pregnant women.





DHANURASANA

Dhanurasana is derived from the Sanskrit word 'dhanur' meaning a bow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach, keeping your feet hip-width apart and your arms beside your body. Now, gently fold your knees and hold your ankles. While inhaling raise the thighs, head and chest as high as possible balancing the weight of the body on the lower abdomen. Join the ankles. Look upward and breathe normally and hold the pose for 15-20 seconds. Exhale and release the pose.

Benefits:

- It strengthens your shoulders, arms, neck, abdomen, back, thighs & hamstring muscles.
- It energizes the body
- It helps improve stomach disorders.
- It helps in reducing abdominal fat.
- It regulates the pancreas and is recommended for people with diabetes.
- It expands the thoracic region of the chest.
- It alleviates a hunchback.
- It increases the appetite.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from high blood pressure, back pain, headache or migraine.
- It is strictly prohibited for people who have undergone abdominal surgery.
- Should be avoided by women during pregnancy and menstruation.

MALASANA

The Sanskrit word 'malasana' comes from two words, 'mala' meaning garland and 'asana' meaning pose.

Instructions: Stand with your feet apart (2 feet) and turn your toes out slightly. Keep your gaze forward and your spine straight as you push your hips back and lower down as if into a chair, pressing the feet into the floor with your body weight evenly balanced on both feet. The goal is to bring the hips as low as you can without rounding the spine. If you can't lower down without your heels lifting off the mat, roll up a towel or blanket and place it beneath the heels. Bring your hands to prayer position in the mid-chest area. You may push into the inner knees with your elbows, further opening your hips. Hold the pose for a few breaths and raise the body to original standing pose while inhaling.

Benefits:

- It helps open and strengthen the hips, inner thighs and lengthens the spine.
- It keeps the pelvic and hip joints healthy.
- It tones the abdominal muscles and improves the function of the colon to help with elimination.
- It increases circulation and blood flow in the pelvis, which can help regulate sexual energy.
- It improves balance, concentration and focus.
- It is particularly beneficial for pregnant women as it aids in childbirth.

Caution:

- Avoid the pose if you have knee injuries.
- Don't stay in the pose if you have pain in the groins.





MARJARIASANA & BITILASANA

Marjariasana - Bitilasana is a combination of two asanas that comprise one of the most basic yoga movements often used as a warm up routine. The name 'Marjariasana' comes from the Sanskrit word 'marjari' meaning cat and the word 'Bitilasana' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bitila', meaning cow and 'asana' refers to posture.

Instructions: Get on your hands and knees in table top position. Ensure your shoulders are directly above your wrists and your hips are over your knees. Inhale and push your tail bone up towards the ceiling, letting the spine arch inwards by keeping the belly dropped towards the floor. Keep your shoulders engaged and away from your ears and lift your chin and chest and gaze up towards the ceiling. This is the Cow Pose. In Cow, let the movement start from the tailbone. Allow your neck and head to be the very last part of the movement.

As you exhale, draw your belly to your spine and release the crown of your head toward the floor, gently releasing the back of your neck and pushing the chin to your chest. While doing this, tilt your pelvis under and around your spine and curve your back round upwards by drawing the navel firmly in towards the spine, keep your shoulders engaged and press into the mat with your hands, shins and the tops of your feet. The pose should look like a cat stretching its back. Keep the gaze downward and the head bent between the arms. This is Cat Pose. Alternate these poses. Keep your shoulder blades broad and draw your shoulders away from your ears to protect your neck during the movements. Inhale and go to Cow Pose and then exhale and return to Cat Pose. Repeat 5-20 times and then rest by sitting back on your heels with your torso upright.

Benefits:

- This combination improves posture and balance.
- It provides relief from back pain and sciatica symptoms.
- It strengthens and stretches the spine and neck.
- It stimulates the kidneys and adrenal glands.
- It stretches the hips, abdomen and the upper and lower back.
- It strengthens the wrists and shoulders.
- It massages the digestive organs and improves digestion.
- It relaxes the mind.
- It improves blood circulation.

Caution:

- It should be avoided in case of a neck or a spinal injury.

JANU SIRASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'janu' meaning knee, 'shirsha' meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the feet together and the spine erect. Bend your right knee and press the sole of the right foot against the inner part of your left thigh close to the groin. Gently swing the right knee away from the left foot so that the thighs form an angle greater than 90 degrees and press it gently against the floor. Make sure that the chest and navel are in a straight line with the outstretched left leg. This will set your torso in the right position. Let your hands provide support as they rest beside the hips. Inhale deeply by pushing the belly and chest torso upwards. Then exhale and bend forward from the base of the hip keeping the torso straight. (avoid bending forward from the waist or rounding it). Reach for your ankles or toes, if you can, with your hands or stretch till you are comfortable. Hold the pose and breathe deep and slow. As you breathe, feel the breath filling the groin, the back of your left leg, and the entire area of your back. Inhale and release the pose. Repeat the asana with the right leg stretched out. Do three to four sets.

Benefits:

- It revitalizes the body and aids digestion.
- It strengthens the shoulders, spine, groins and the hamstrings.
- It stimulates the liver and kidneys.
- It relieves stress, anxiety, fatigue, headache and mild depression.
- It is very good for treating high blood pressure, insomnia and sinusitis.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and therefore, menstrual and menopausal disorders are reduced.
- During pregnancy, this asana helps to strengthen the back muscles. However, this asana should be practiced only up to the second trimester.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have diarrhoea, asthma or lumbar disc herniation or a serious lower back injury.





PARIVRTTA UTKATASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘parivrtta’ meaning to turn around or revolve, ‘utkata’ meaning intense and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight with your feet together, with your thighs and big toes touching. Inhale and raise your arms above your head. Exhale and bend your knees and bring your thighs as parallel to the ground as possible ensuring that your knees just stay slightly ahead of our toes. The torso should remain straight. This is the chair pose. Lower your arms and bring your palms together in a prayer position close to your chest. Exhaling, twist your torso to the right. Bring your left elbow to the outside of your right thigh. Move your left hip back slightly and align the knees to maintain balance. Press your upper left arm against your thigh and push your right shoulder blade upwards into your back to help the chest turn towards the right. Keep the shoulders away from the ears while twisting. Turn your gaze upwards when the twist is completed. Keep your weight on your feet and keep them pressed together firmly to maintain balance. Stay in the pose for a minute breathing calmly. Inhale and return to the center and gradually ease out of the pose and repeat on the other side. Do at least 3 sets.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and help to improve digestion and elimination.
- It improves the metabolism.
- It strengthens and increases the flexibility of the shoulders, spine and neck.
- It strengthens and tones the leg and calf muscles.
- It stimulates the internal organs and the heart.

Caution:

- This pose should not be practiced by those suffering from low blood pressure, headaches, hip, ankle or spinal injuries.
- This asana should not be practiced by persons with sleeping disorders and pregnant women.

PARIVRTTA JANU SIRASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘parivrtta’ meaning twisted, ‘janu’ meaning knee, ‘sirsa’ meaning head and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Begin by sitting on the floor with your legs wide open in front of you. Bend the left leg and tuck the foot in the angle of the groin. Keep the right leg outstretched and make sure that the knee faces the ceiling and is softly bent. As you exhale, bend sideways towards the right in such a manner that the back part of the right shoulder presses towards the inner part of the right knee. The elbow should be settled on the floor gently close to the inner side of the right knee and the hand should clasp the middle part of the sole of the right foot. Hold the right foot with both hands, the right hand from along the inside of the right knee and the left hand reaching out for the toes of the right foot from above the head. Keep the left folded leg anchored to the floor throughout. Now while holding the right foot, slowly extend and straighten the knee. As you straighten your right knee, shift your torso to face the ceiling. As you do this, lift the left hand and let it move above your head pressing it against the left ear. Keep your elbows firmly apart and stretch your torso as you do it. Hold this pose for a few seconds. Release your arms first and then gently ease out of the pose as you inhale. Repeat the same with the other leg and other side. Beginners can keep the outstretched knee slightly bent.

Benefits:

- It stretches the abdominal organs, especially the colon, liver, spleen, and pancreas and aids in digestion and elimination.
- It stretches the shoulders, spine and hamstrings and strengthens the shoulders.
- It stimulates the kidneys, the liver and other important abdominal organs.
- It provides relief from mild backache.
- It relaxes the body and helps in reducing anxiety.
- It helps in the treatment of insomnia.
- It cures headache and reduces stress levels.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people with spinal and knee injuries.





PASASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'pasa' meaning a noose or snare and 'asana' meaning a posture. In this asana, the human body creates a 'noose' when the practitioner wraps his/her arms around a squatting posture.

Instructions: You must do this asana on an empty stomach. Stand straight with both feet shoulder width apart. Gently get into squat position ensuring that the knees are aligned with the toes and not stretched beyond them. Get the hips as close to the heels as possible and rest your torso against your thighs. Bend your knees slightly to the left. Starting at the belly, twist to your right and extend your left arm to bring its upper part to the outside of the right knee. Support the pose by using your right hand for leverage by stretch it and sweeping it to the back. Hold your left wrist with your right hand. You could also just hook your fingers if your hands can't go all the way. The idea is to make a noose. Both the shoulders should be stretched apart and the right hand will be high and the left hand will be low. For the full pose, it's necessary to close any space between the left side of the torso and the tops of the thighs. Keep your belly soft and use the pressure of the palms to increase the twist. Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to a minute. Release the twist with an exhalation, then repeat for the same length of time to the left.

Benefits:

- It helps cure mild stress in the neck, back and shoulder.
- It tones the ankles and makes them strong.
- It gives the spine, groins and thighs a good stretch.
- The chest and the shoulders open up with this asana and it helps asthmatic patients.
- It massages the internal organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- The body posture is enhanced with regular practice of this asana.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by pregnant women and women during menstruation.

PASCHIMOTTANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'paschima' meaning back of the body and 'uttana' meaning intense stretch or extended and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the spine erect. Breathing in, raise both arms above your head and stretch/elongate your spine upwards. Breathing out, bend forward from the hip joints, chin moving toward the toes and the navel towards the knees. Keep the spine erect and do not curve it. Brings the arms forward over your head as you bend down. Place your hands on your knees or clasp the toes if possible without bending the knees. Rest your head down and breathe deeply for 20-60 seconds. Try and rest the elbows on the floor close to the knees. Hold the posture for at least 30-45 seconds or more. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and aids digestion and elimination.
- It reduces fatty deposits in the abdomen.
- It reduces anxiety, anger and irritability and provides relief from stress.
- It stretches the spine and brings flexibility.
- Its regular practice cures impotency and enhances sexual power.
- It balances the menstrual cycles.
- It is recommended especially for women after delivery.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by pregnant women or by those suffering from slip disc or sciatica problem. It should also be avoided by ulcer patients and people suffering from asthma.





PAWANMUKTASANA

The name 'pawanmuktasana' is derived from Sanskrit words; 'pavana' meaning wind, 'mukta' which means to release and 'asana' meaning posture.

Introduction: Lie on your back with your feet together and arms beside your body. Breathe in and as you exhale, bring your right knee towards your chest and press the thigh on your abdomen with clasped hands. Keep the other leg extended and straight. Breathe in again and as you exhale, lift your head and chest off the floor and touch your chin to your right knee. Hold the posture for 30 seconds. Breathe normally if you can't hold the breath. As you exhale, come back to the ground and relax. Repeat this pose with the left leg and then with both the legs together (as in image). When performing this posture with both legs together, you may rock up and down or roll from side to side 3-5 times and then relax.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the abdominal muscles and massages the intestines and internal organs of the digestive system releasing trapped gases and improving digestion.
- It strengthens the back and abdominal muscles.
- It improves the circulation of blood in the hip area.
- It eases the tension in the lower back.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and massages the pelvic muscles. It also helps to cure menstrual disorders.
- It helps burn fat in the thighs, buttocks and abdominal area.
- It helps to stretch the back and neck.

Caution:

- Persons suffering from high blood pressure, heart problems, hyperacidity, hernia, slip disc, testicle disorder, menstruation, neck and back problems should avoid this asana.
- This asana must not be practiced by pregnant and menstruating women.

PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA

This name is derived from Sanskrit words 'prasarita' meaning stretched out, 'pada' meaning foot 'uttan' meaning intense stretch and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight on your mat, with your feet hip-distance apart and rest your hands on your hips. Exhale and gently soften your knees and bend forward from the hips (not the waist) keeping the knees straight and soft (beginners can bend their knees slightly). Bring your palms or finger tips to the floor slightly in front of or beside your feet. Beginners can cross their forearms and hold your elbows in case they cant touch the floor. Press the heels firmly into the floor and lift the hip toward the ceiling. Turn the top thighs slightly inward. Feel the fold and the stretch from your hip bone. If you feel it from the rounding of your lower back, you are doing something wrong. Exhale and maintaining the length of the front torso, lean the torso forward from the hip joints. As your torso approaches parallel to the floor, press your fingertips onto the floor directly below your shoulders. You can bend or extend your elbows fully. Your legs and arms then should be perpendicular to the floor and parallel to each other. Keep the head and neck elongated between the shoulders and keep the shoulders away from the ears. Hold the pose for as long as you can breathing softly.

Benefits:

- It improves blood circulation and rejuvenates the liver, kidneys and spleen.
- It improves flexibility of the hip joint and strengthens the knees, spine and the hamstring and calf muscles.
- It improves posture and alignment.
- It improves the functions of the endocrine and the nervous system.
- It eases tension in the back, shoulders and neck.
- It tones and activates the muscles of the abdomen and improves digestion.
- It calms the brain and provides relief from headaches, fatigue and mild depression.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have a lower back or hamstring injury or if you suffer from sciatica or glaucoma.





PURVOTTANASANA

Purvottanasana in Sanskrit means an intense stretch eastwards. East also means the front of the body and it is usually the direction of budding potential and new beginnings.

Instructions: Begin by sitting on the floor with your legs extended in front of you and your arms resting at your sides. Place your hands behind your hips with the tips of your fingers right behind your buttocks. Either point your fingers towards your body, which is more common or away from your body. If you point them towards your body, your shoulders will be less open, but it's a great stretch for your wrist flexors. If you have limited range of motion of the wrist, this posture may hurt and is not recommended. If you point your fingers away from your body, your shoulders will be more open and will allow a greater stretch in your chest. Choose the option that is comfortable for you. Exhale and lift your bottom off the floor, pressing your hips upward and straighten your legs one at a time keeping your buttocks soft. Support the lift by keeping your shoulders firmly pushing back. Do not collapse into your shoulders. Lengthen your spine and your arms. Keep your shoulders away from your ears. As you move into posture, you should keep the neck elongated as you fight gravity. Once you are comfortable in the pose, you can lower the head gently towards the floor keeping the chin facing the ceiling. Relax and breathe steadily. Hold the posture for at least 30 seconds. Ease out of the pose as you exhale.

Benefits:

- It strengthens your triceps, wrists, back and legs.
- It stretches your shoulders, chest and ankles.
- It relieves stress.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people with shoulder, wrist or knee injury.

SALAMBA SARVANGASANA

The name Salamba Sarvangasana comes from the Sanskrit words 'salamba' meaning supported, 'Sarva' meaning all and 'anga' meaning limb or bodypart, and 'asana' meaning posture. Thus 'salamba sarvangasana' literally translates to supported-all-limbs-pose.

Instructions: Start by lying flat on your back, keeping your legs together and your arms by your side. With one swift but easy movement, lift your legs, buttocks, and back, such that your elbows support your lower body and you stand high on your shoulders. Use your hands to support your back. As you settle down in the pose, make sure you move your elbows closer to each other. Straighten your spine and legs. Your body weight should lie on your shoulders and upper arms. Do not support your body on your neck or head. Firm up your legs and point your toes out. Hold the posture for about 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe deeply while you do so. If you feel any strain on your neck, release immediately. To release, lower your knees, and bring your hands to the floor. Then, lie flat and relax.

Benefits:

- It helps calm the brain, cures mild depression and relieves stress.
- It stimulates the prostate and the thyroid glands and the abdominal organs.
- It increases the blood flow to the internal organs and is very good for the digestive and the respiratory system. It cures digestive ailments and respiratory ailments like asthma and bronchitis.
- This asana relieves the symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from chronic fatigue and insomnia.
- It improves reproductive functions and improves fertility.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from high blood pressure and shoulder and neck injuries.





SALAMBA SIRSASANA

The name of this asana is derived from the Sanskrit words 'salamba' meaning with support, 'sirsa', meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Place a soft blanket on the floor to cushion your head before you start the asana. Then, kneel down on the floor on your forearms and interlace your fingers. The forearms should be pressed firmly into the floor and the elbows spread out shoulder width apart. Place the crown of your head on the blanket in a manner that it fits against your clasped hands. Breathe in, lift your knees and tip toe towards your elbows. Lift your thighs and your sitting bones so that your body forms an inverted 'V'. Keep the torso straight and do not curve the spine. As you breathe out, lift your feet off the floor. It is important to lift both the feet together. You can keep the knees slightly bent as you push up. Slowly and without jerking, push your heels up towards the ceiling till the body is aligned in a straight line, perpendicular to the floor. Keep your tail bone tightly squeezed through the asana and balance your body on your forearms. Hold the pose for about 10 seconds initially and gradually increase it to a maximum of five minutes. Fold the legs at the knees while bringing the legs down to ease out of the pose.

Benefits:

- It stimulates and regulates the pineal and pituitary glands.
- It improves blood circulation and rejuvenates all the vital internal organs.
- It revitalizes the reproductive organs and is particularly beneficial for curing infertility and menopausal symptoms.
- It calms the mind and is very useful in stress relief.
- It rejuvenates the lungs and is useful in curing asthma and sinusitis.
- It tones the digestive system and improves its functioning.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have a heart condition or are suffering from spinal, neck or shoulder injury.
- People with blood pressure should avoid the asana.
- This is an advanced pose and should be practiced under supervision only.

SALAMBA SIRASANA

The name of this asana is derived from the Sanskrit words 'salamba' meaning with support, 'sirsa', meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Place a soft blanket on the floor to cushion your head before you start the asana. Then, kneel down on the floor on your forearms and interlace your fingers. The forearms should be pressed firmly into the floor and the elbows spread out shoulder width apart. Place the crown of your head on the blanket in a manner that it fits against your clasped hands. Breathe in, lift your knees and tip toe towards your elbows. Lift your thighs and your sitting bones so that your body forms an inverted 'V'. Keep the torso straight and do not curve the spine. As you breathe out, lift your feet off the floor. It is important to lift both the feet together. You can keep the knees slightly bent as you push up. Slowly and without jerking, push your heels up towards the ceiling till the body is aligned in a straight line, perpendicular to the floor. Keep your tail bone tightly squeezed through the asana and balance your body on your forearms. Hold the pose for about 10 seconds initially and gradually increase it to a maximum of five minutes. Fold the legs at the knees while bringing the legs down to ease out of the pose.

Benefits:

- It stimulates and regulates the pineal and pituitary glands.
- It improves blood circulation and rejuvenates all the vital internal organs.
- It revitalizes the reproductive organs and is particularly beneficial for curing infertility and menopausal symptoms.
- It calms the mind and is very useful in stress relief.
- It rejuvenates the lungs and is useful in curing asthma and sinusitis.
- It tones the digestive system and improves its functioning.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have a heart condition or are suffering from spinal, neck or shoulder injury.
- People with blood pressure should avoid the asana.
- This is an advanced pose and should be practiced under supervision only.





BADDHA KONASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'baddha' meaning bound, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and stretch your legs out. Elevate your hips slightly by placing a soft blanket under your hip bones in case you feel any discomfort sitting directly on the floor. Exhale and bend your knees pulling your heels towards your pelvis. Press the soles of your feet close together, and let your knees drop to the sides. Push the outer edges of your feet firmly into the floor and wrap your hands around your feet or ankles. With the pelvis in a neutral position, gently work the outer knees towards the floor. Never force your knees down. Always ensure that the spine is erect, neck long and the shoulder blades be drawn away from the ears. This pose can be held anywhere from 1-10 minutes. To exit the pose, draw your knees towards one another, extend your legs and return to the sitting pose. Your knees should never ever be forced towards the ground.

Benefits:

- It stimulates and tones the abdominal organs, ovaries, prostate gland, bladder and kidneys.
- It stretches the inner thighs, groins and knees.
- It helps relieve mild depression, anxiety and fatigue.
- It eases menstrual discomfort and sciatica.
- It provides relief from the symptoms of menopause.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from knee injury.

SUPTA MATSYENDRASANA

The name 'supta matsyendrasana' is named after an ancient yoga master, 'matseyendra' whose name literally means "lord of the fishes" and the Sanskrit word 'sooptah' meaning reclined.

Instructions: Lie on your back with your arms on the sides. Inhale and draw your right knee to your chest keeping your left leg extended on the floor. Extend your right arm out along the floor at shoulder height with your palm facing down and pressed against the floor as in image. Twist your hips slightly to the right and place your left hand on the outside of your right knee. Exhaling, drop your right knee over the left side of your body using the left hand to push the bent knee gently down towards the floor on the left side. Turn your head to the right and gaze towards the fingertips of the extended right hand. Keep your shoulder blades pressed against the floor and away from your ears. Hold the pose for 10-25 breaths. Inhale and bring the knee to centre and gradually release the pose and repeat on the other side. Do 3-4 sets.

Benefits:

- It massages the abdomen and improves digestion and helps to remove toxins.
- It stretches, strengthens and relaxes the spine making it more flexible.
- It helps to hydrate the spinal discs.

Caution:

- Please do not do this asana if you suffer from a spinal injury or have a degenerative disc disease.





SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA

The name Supta Baddha Konasana comes from four Sanskrit words: 'supta' meaning reclining, 'baddha' meaning bound, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on the ground with your arms by your side. Bend your knees and bring the heels of both feet close to the groin keeping the soles of both feet together. Your palms must lie next to your hips and pressed downwards. Exhale deeply by contracting the abdominal muscles and squeezing the tail bone upwards close to your pubic bone. Feel the stretch in your lower back and hold this position. Quickly inhale and as you exhale again, let your knees open up and give a good stretch to your inner thighs and the groin area. Do not arch your spine forcefully while breathing and keep your shoulders broad and away from the neck while doing the asana. Stay in the pose for up to a minute breathing deeply and slowly. Exhale and release the pose going back to the lying down position. Some might prefer to keep the palms facing upwards through the pose for greater relaxation.

Benefits:

- It calms and rejuvenates the digestive system and provides relief from irritable bowel syndrome.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and is useful in curing infertility and menstrual disorders and provides relief from symptoms of menopause.
- It activates the prostate gland, kidneys and bladder.
- It stretches the inner thighs, knees and the groin.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from mild depression and anxiety.
- It helps to open up the hips and flexes the hip flexors.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have knee, groin or hip injury and in case of lower back pain.
- Pregnant women should do this asana under supervision only and should keep their chest and head raised by placing a soft blanket.

UPAVISTHA KONASANA

The term comes from the Sanskrit words 'upavistha' meaning seated, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and keep the spine straight with the legs straight in front of you. Lean your torso back slightly on your hands and slide both the legs outwards in such a manner that they spread on the sides of the pelvis (the legs should form a 90 degree angle with the pelvis as in the image). Press your hands against the floor and slide your buttocks forward, widening the legs another 10 to 20 degrees. If you feel uncomfortable, raise the buttocks slightly by placing a folded blanket under the buttocks. Let your toes point upwards. The knee caps of the outstretched legs should point straight up toward the ceiling. Now with your buttocks pressed heavily into the floor and your knee caps pointing up at the ceiling, walk your hands forward between your legs as you exhale gently. Keep your arms long. As with all forward bends, the emphasis is on moving from the hip joints and maintaining the length of the front torso. Do not bend from the waist or curve it. Always bend forward from the hip keeping the torso straight. Stay in the pose for a minute or so breathing calmly. Inhale, raise the torso and release the pose gently. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It gives a very good stretch to the hips, legs, the abductor muscles of the groin and the hamstrings.
- It tones and detoxifies the internal organs and improves digestion.
- It soothes the mind and helps reduce stress and anxiety.
- It provides relief from sciatica and arthritis.
- It detoxifies the kidneys.
- It activates the core muscles.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from lower spine, groin, hip or hamstring injuries.
- This asana should be avoided by pregnant or menstruating women.





URDHVA DHANURASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words ‘urdhva’ or upward facing and ‘dhanur’ meaning bow and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back on the floor with your arms placed beside you, palms facing downwards and legs hip width apart. Bend your knees and bring the soles of both feet as close to the buttocks as possible. Make sure that your feet are hip-width apart. Bring your hands behind each corresponding shoulder, palm facing downwards, fingers open and pointing towards the shoulder. Inhale and lift your body off the floor by pressing the soles of the feet and the palms firmly into the floor. The body will form a bow shape as you lift it towards the ceiling. Lift it as much as you can ensuring that your legs and knees stay in line with the hips and do not splay outwards to avoid putting pressure on the back. Let your head hang gently. Your neck should be long. Breathe calmly as you hold the pose for 30-60 seconds. Exhale and gently lower the body and go to starting position. Lie down calmly in shavasana between the postures. You can repeat the asana 2-3 times.

Benefits:

- It stimulates the pituitary and thyroid glands.
- It helps to expand the chest and stimulates and expands the lungs and increases oxygen supply and hence is very good for asthmatic patients.
- It massages the internal organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- It stretches and tones the legs, abdomen, buttocks, spine, shoulder blades, glutes, hamstrings, wrists and arms.
- It is known to help in stress relief and treats depression.
- It stimulates the reproductive system and helps in curing infertility.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you are suffering from spinal or wrist injury or carpal tunnel syndrome.
- People with high blood pressure and headache and migraine problem should not perform this asana.

URDHVA PRASARITA PADASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words; 'urdhva' meaning upwards, 'prasarita' meaning extended, 'pada' meaning foot and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie straight on the floor on your back with your arms along your sides or extend them outwards. Keep the legs extended and feet together. Exhale and contract your core abdominal muscles, draw the navel into the spine and press the sides of the waist into the floor and raise your legs together vertically upward without bending, making a right angle with the floor. Squeeze your tail bone down as your legs go up. Beginners can bend their knees and bring the heels close to the hips before unfolding and raising them straight up. Hold the position for 20-40 seconds and then lower the legs without bending a third way down (without jerking and without touching the floor) and again take them back to the 90 degree position. Inhale as you come down and exhale as you go up. You can repeat this action 5-10 times. Do not raise the back and the lower hip from the floor as you do this asana.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the core abdominal muscles and reduces abdominal fat.
- It improves lumbar spine strength.
- It improves flexibility of the hip flexors.
- It improves digestion and elimination.
- It strengthens the Manipura chakra that improves self-discipline and will power.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons with lower back injuries and sciatica.
- Pregnant and menstruating women should also avoid this asana.





UTTANASANA

The name is derived from Sanskrit words, 'uttana' meaning an intense stretch and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight and rest your hands on your hips. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints keeping the knees soft. Do not bend from the waist and keep the torso straight as you bend forward. You might have to move your hips slightly as you bend forward to avoid losing balance. Keep your sitting bones/hips pointing towards the ceiling and do not let them slouch. Let your hands rest on the ground, in front of or next to your feet. The legs should be parallel to each other maximum shoulder width apart and the toes should point forward. The chest should press against the thighs, the neck should be long and the head can dangle with the chin close to the knees and your gaze fixed between your legs. Hold the pose for as long as you can, breathing calmly. Feel the fold and the stretch from your hip bone and the hamstrings. To release the pose, inhale lift the torso up from the hip bone without curving your back contracting the core and the hip muscles and pressing the tailbone down firmly without curving or rolling the spine or the neck. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and revitalizes the digestive system and improves digestion and elimination.
- It activates the liver and the kidneys.
- It stretches and strengthens the back, hips, calves and the hamstrings.
- It helps to reduce stress and provides relief from anxiety.
- It provides relief from headaches and insomnia.
- It gives relief in menopause and from menstrual problems.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, asthma, sinusitis and osteoporosis.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and helps cure infertility.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have lower back or hamstring injuries or if you suffer from sciatica or glaucoma.

GARUDASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'garuda' meaning eagle and 'asana' meaning posture. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports God Vishnu and helps humanity fight against demons.

Instructions: Stand erect. Gently bend your right knee, and wrap your left leg around your right, such that the knees are stacked over each other. Your left foot must touch your right shin. Raise your arms to the shoulder height and wrap your right hand around your left. Ensure that your elbows are bent at 90-degree angles and are also stacked. Slowly turn the hands so that the palms face each other. Balance the body well and lower the hips gently without leaning on either side. Hold the pose for a few seconds. Breathe deeply and slowly. Focus on the third eye (between the eyebrows on the forehead) and let go of your negative emotions. Release the pose, switch the limbs and repeat.

Benefits:

- It stretches and tones the hips, thighs, shoulders and upper back.
- It improves balance and strengthens the calves.
- It provides relief from sciatica and rheumatism.
- It increases the flexibility of the limbs.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this pose if you have had a recent knee, ankle or elbow injury.





UPAVISTHA KONASANA

The term comes from the Sanskrit words 'upavistha' meaning seated, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and keep the spine straight with the legs straight in front of you. Lean your torso back slightly on your hands and slide both the legs outwards in such a manner that they spread on the sides of the pelvis (the legs should form a 90 degree angle with the pelvis as in the image). Press your hands against the floor and slide your buttocks forward, widening the legs another 10 to 20 degrees. If you feel uncomfortable, raise the buttocks slightly by placing a folded blanket under the buttocks. Let your toes point upwards. The knee caps of the outstretched legs should point straight up toward the ceiling. Now with your buttocks pressed heavily into the floor and your knee caps pointing up at the ceiling, walk your hands forward between your legs as you exhale gently. Keep your arms long. As with all forward bends, the emphasis is on moving from the hip joints and maintaining the length of the front torso. Do not bend from the waist or curve it. Always bend forward from the hip keeping the torso straight. Stay in the pose for a minute or so breathing calmly. Inhale, raise the torso and release the pose gently. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It gives a very good stretch to the hips, legs, the abductor muscles of the groin and the hamstrings.
- It tones and detoxifies the internal organs and improves digestion.
- It soothes the mind and helps reduce stress and anxiety.
- It provides relief from sciatica and arthritis.
- It detoxifies the kidneys.
- It activates the core muscles.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from lower spine, groin, hip or hamstring injuries.
- This asana should be avoided by pregnant or menstruating women.

HALASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words 'hala' meaning plow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie straight on your back, feet together with your arms placed beside your body and your palms facing downwards. Inhale and lift your feet and hips and waist (in that order) off the ground using your abdominal muscles. Your legs should be at a 90-degree angle from the floor. Use your hands to support your hips and legs. Bend your legs from the hips so that they are parallel to the floor and take them beyond your head without bending the legs and press the toes into the mat. Gaze at the navel and Keep the neck long and the shoulders broad. The weight of the lifted part of the body should be borne by the shoulders without putting any pressure on the neck. The hands can continue to support the raised hips or can be outstretched and clasped together as in figure. Remain in the posture for 40-60 seconds while focussing on your breathing pattern. Exhale and gently bring down your legs, waist and torso without jerking.

Benefits:

- It regulates metabolism and helps in weight loss.
- It massages the digestive organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- It removes toxins from the urinary and the digestive tract.
- It regulates the working of the thyroid and the pituitary gland.
- It is known to regulate sugar levels and hence is very good for diabetics.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and provides relief from infertility and symptoms of menopause.
- It helps reduce stress and fatigue.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons suffering from neck or spinal injury, diarrhoea or high blood pressure.
- Women should avoid the asana during their menstruation and pregnancy.





ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'adhas' meaning 'down', 'mukha' meaning face, 'śvana' meaning dog and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Go on your fours into a table top position. Exhale and gently lift your hips straightening your elbows and knees and pushing the chest towards the thighs and drawing the abdomen into the rib cage till such time the body forms an inverted 'V'. Make sure your hands stay in line with your shoulders and your feet in line with your hips. The toes should point inwards. Press your hands firmly into the ground. The neck should be kept long between the stretched arms. Your ears should touch your inner side of the arms and the gaze should be fixed on the navel. Hold the pose for 30-40 seconds. Make sure that the spine remains straight and does not curve while doing or holding the pose. Breathe calmly while holding the pose. Gently go back to the table top and repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It improves circulation throughout the body.
- It strengthens and tones the abdominal muscles and improves digestion and elimination.
- It massages the internal organs.
- It provides relief from anxiety and stress.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you suffer from high blood pressure, eye ailments, carpal tunnel syndrome, shoulder and wrist injuries.

ANANDA BALASANA

The name Ananda Balasana is derived from the Sanskrit words ‘ananda’ meaning happiness, ‘bala’ meaning child and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back. Inhale and lift your legs up, bringing both your knees above the chest close to the armpits. The ankles should be vertically stacked above the knees. Grasp your toes by stretching out your arms from the inner side of the legs. Gently nudge your hips apart and widen your legs to deepen the stretch along the inner thighs. Ensure that you press the torso, tailbone, sacrum, neck, head and shoulders down on the floor. Breathe calmly, consciously observing the inhalation and exhalation as you hold the pose. Stay in the pose for a minute. Exhale and release your arms and legs and bring them down without a jerk.

Benefits:

- It gives a good stretch to the groin, inner thighs and the hamstrings.
- It opens the hip and releases the tension in the spine.
- It gently massages the digestive system.
- It provides relief from anxiety and stress.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from a neck or knee injury.
- Should be avoided by women during pregnancy and menstruation.
- Should be avoided by persons with high blood pressure.





ANJALI MUDRA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words; ‘anjali’ meaning divine offering/a gesture of reverence or salutation and ‘mudra’ meaning seal or sign.

Instructions: Sit cross legged keeping the spine straight and the shoulders broad. Fold your hands in a traditional greeting posture pressing the palms together finger to finger and rest the thumbs close to the sternum. The fingers should be pointing upwards as in image. Raise your elbows to stay aligned with the wrists and bow your head slightly in reverence. Stay in this posture for as long as you want focusing on your breathing pattern.

Benefits :

- It is known to balance the right and the left hemispheres of the brain restoring peace and calm.
- It reduces stress and anxiety.
- It is a very good pose for meditation.

Caution:

- Persons with knee injuries can avoid the sitting posture and can perform this mudra while standing straight.

BHUJANGASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bhujanga' meaning snake and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach with the hands placed on the sides and with your feet and heels lightly touching each other. Place your hands, palm downwards under the shoulders with the elbows firmly tucked close to/into the torso while keeping the navel on the floor. Now, placing your body's weight on your palms, inhale and raise your head and trunk. Note that your arms should be bent at your elbows when the body is raised. The neck should be arched upwards and backwards, the shoulder blades should be firm and held away from the ears. Make sure you put equal pressure on both your palms. This position can be held for 15-20 counts and then lowered while exhaling to the original position. One can do an advanced raise by straightening the arm and arching the back as much as possible. Breathing out, gently bring your abdomen, chest and head back to the floor.

Benefits:

- It tones the abdomen and strengthens the spine, back and shoulders.
- It improves flexibility of the upper and middle back.
- It expands the chest and lungs and gives the shoulders and abdomen a good stretch.
- It improves blood circulation and stimulates the digestive, reproductive and urinary systems.
- It reduces fatigue and stress.
- It provides relief from sciatica and asthma.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this asana if you are pregnant, have fractured ribs or wrists or have undergone any abdominal surgeries in the recent past.
- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from Carpal Tunnel Syndrome or have spinal disorders.





UTTANASANA

The name is derived from Sanskrit words, 'uttana' meaning an intense stretch and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight and rest your hands on your hips. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints keeping the knees soft. Do not bend from the waist and keep the torso straight as you bend forward. You might have to move your hips slightly as you bend forward to avoid losing balance. Keep your sitting bones/hips pointing towards the ceiling and do not let them slouch. Let your hands rest on the ground, in front of or next to your feet. The legs should be parallel to each other maximum shoulder width apart and the toes should point forward. The chest should press against the thighs, the neck should be long and the head can dangle with the chin close to the knees and your gaze fixed between your legs. Hold the pose for as long as you can, breathing calmly. Feel the fold and the stretch from your hip bone and the hamstrings. To release the pose, inhale lift the torso up from the hip bone without curving your back contracting the core and the hip muscles and pressing the tailbone down firmly without curving or rolling the spine or the neck. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and revitalizes the digestive system and improves digestion and elimination.
- It activates the liver and the kidneys.
- It stretches and strengthens the back, hips, calves and the hamstrings.
- It helps to reduce stress and provides relief from anxiety.
- It provides relief from headaches and insomnia.
- It gives relief in menopause and from menstrual problems.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, asthma, sinusitis and osteoporosis.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and helps cure infertility.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have lower back or hamstring injuries or if you suffer from sciatica or glaucoma.

JANU SIRASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'janu' meaning knee, 'shirsha' meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the feet together and the spine erect. Bend your right knee and press the sole of the right foot against the inner part of your left thigh close to the groin. Gently swing the right knee away from the left foot so that the thighs form an angle greater than 90 degrees and press it gently against the floor. Make sure that the chest and navel are in a straight line with the outstretched left leg. This will set your torso in the right position. Let your hands provide support as they rest beside the hips. Inhale deeply by pushing the belly and chest torso upwards. Then exhale and bend forward from the base of the hip keeping the torso straight. (avoid bending forward from the waist or rounding it). Reach for your ankles or toes, if you can, with your hands or stretch till you are comfortable. Hold the pose and breathe deep and slow. As you breathe, feel the breath filling the groin, the back of your left leg, and the entire area of your back. Inhale and release the pose. Repeat the asana with the right leg stretched out. Do three to four sets.

Benefits:

- It revitalizes the body and aids digestion.
- It strengthens the shoulders, spine, groins and the hamstrings.
- It stimulates the liver and kidneys.
- It relieves stress, anxiety, fatigue, headache and mild depression.
- It is very good for treating high blood pressure, insomnia and sinusitis.
- v It stimulates the reproductive organs and therefore, menstrual and menopausal disorders are reduced.
- During pregnancy, this asana helps to strengthen the back muscles. However, this asana should be practiced only up to the second trimester.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have diarrhoea, asthma or lumbar disc herniation or a serious lower back injury.





MARJARIASANA & BITILASANA

Marjariasana - Bitilasana is a combination of two asanas that comprise one of the most basic yoga movements often used as a warm up routine. The name 'Marjariasana' comes from the Sanskrit word 'marjari' meaning cat and the word 'Bitilasana' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bitila', meaning cow and 'asana' refers to posture.

Instructions: Get on your hands and knees in table top position. Ensure your shoulders are directly above your wrists and your hips are over your knees. Inhale and push your tail bone up towards the ceiling, letting the spine arch inwards by keeping the belly dropped towards the floor. Keep your shoulders engaged and away from your ears and lift your chin and chest and gaze up towards the ceiling. This is the Cow Pose. In Cow, let the movement start from the tailbone. Allow your neck and head to be the very last part of the movement.

As you exhale, draw your belly to your spine and release the crown of your head toward the floor, gently releasing the back of your neck and pushing the chin to your chest. While doing this, tilt your pelvis under and around your spine and curve your back round upwards by drawing the navel firmly in towards the spine, keep your shoulders engaged and press into the mat with your hands, shins and the tops of your feet. The pose should look like a cat stretching its back. Keep the gaze downward and the head bent between the arms. This is Cat Pose. Alternate these poses. Keep your shoulder blades broad and draw your shoulders away from your ears to protect your neck during the movements. Inhale and go to Cow Pose and then exhale and return to Cat Pose. Repeat 5-20 times and then rest by sitting back on your heels with your torso upright.

Benefits:

- This combination improves posture and balance.
- It strengthens and stretches the spine and neck.
- It stimulates the kidneys and adrenal glands.
- It massages the digestive organs and improves digestion.
- It improves blood circulation.
- It provides relief from back pain and sciatica symptoms.
- It stretches the hips, abdomen and the upper and lower back.
- It strengthens the wrists and shoulders.
- It relaxes the mind.

Caution:

- It should be avoided in case of a neck or a spinal injury.

MATSYASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words 'matsya' meaning fish and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back in a comfortable posture with the legs outstretched and the arms by your side. Place the hands underneath the hips, palms facing down. Bring the elbows closer toward the waist and each other. Cross your legs such that your feet cross each other close to the groin area with your thighs and knees pressed against the floor or keep them straight as in image. Inhale deeply and lift your chest and head up from in between the shoulder blades and then keeping the chest elevated lower the head backward and allow the crown to touch the floor gently. Make sure the weight of the body while lifting is borne by the shoulders and the elbows and no pressure is put on the neck and the head. You can bring the hands forward from below the hips to clasp the feet (if the legs are crossed) or else leave them under the hips as per your comfort level. Hold the position for as long as you can breathing calmly. Now lift the head up and gently lower the chest and the head back to the lying position and untangle your legs without a jerk. Repeat the asana 2-3 times.

Benefits:

- It tones and stimulates the pituitary, parathyroid and pineal glands.
- It gives the throat and the digestive organs a good massage and aids in digestion and elimination.
- It tones and strengthens the spine, chest and the shoulder region.
- It expands the chest and gives relief from respiratory disorders.
- It strengthens the muscles of the upper back, the shoulders and neck.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from anxiety and stress.
- It is a good treatment for menstrual disorders.

Caution:

- It should be avoided by people suffering from lower back and neck injuries.





PADANGUSTHASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit 'pada' meaning foot, 'angustha' meaning big toe and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand upright with your feet shoulder width apart and the arms raised up. Tighten your front thigh muscles and keeping your legs completely straight, exhale and bend forward from your hip joints keeping your torso straight. Bend your torso and head as one unit and bring the arms down and bend the elbows out to the sides. Slide and hook the fingers under the feet and grip the big toes firmly. Press your toes down firmly against your fingers and press the your forehead into your shins. Keep the torso straight and do not curve the back while getting into the pose and while in it. Hold the pose for a minute breathing calmly. Inhale and lift the body to the original position making sure your torso and head comes back to a standing position as a single unit. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and improves the digestive system and elimination of wastes.
- It stimulates the liver and kidneys and helps in better removal of toxins.
- It helps in reducing stress and anxiety.
- It tones and strengthens the calves and hamstrings.
- It provides relief from menopause and menstrual disorders.
- It provides relief from headaches and insomnia.

Caution:

- It should be avoided by people suffering from lower back injuries.

PADMASANA

The name Padmasana is derived from the words 'padma' meaning lotus and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit on the floor or on a mat with legs stretched out in front of you while keeping the spine erect. Bend the right knee and bring the right foot to rest on the left thigh with the sole of the feet facing upward and the heel placed close to the abdomen. Do the same with the left leg and foot. With both the legs crossed and feet placed on opposite thighs, place your hands on the knees in mudra position. Keep the head straight and spine erect. Stay in the posture calmly focussing on the breathing pattern as you inhale and exhale deeply. Stay in the posture for as long as you can.

Benefits:

- It calms the mind and reduces stress and anxiety.
- It improves digestion.
- It reduces muscular tension and brings blood pressure under control.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by those suffering from a knee or ankle injury.





PASCHIMOTTANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘paschima’ meaning back of the body and ‘uttana’ meaning intense stretch or extended and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the spine erect. Breathing in, raise both arms above your head and stretch/elongate your spine upwards. Breathing out, bend forward from the hip joints, chin moving toward the toes and the navel towards the knees. Keep the spine erect and do not curve it. Brings the arms forward over your head as you bend down. Place your hands on your knees or clasp the toes if possible without bending the knees. Rest your head down and breathe deeply for 20-60 seconds. Try and rest the elbows on the floor close to the knees. Hold the posture for at least 30-45 seconds or more. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and aids digestion and elimination.
- It reduces fatty deposits in the abdomen.
- It reduces anxiety, anger and irritability and provides relief from stress.
- It stretches the spine and brings flexibility.
- Its regular practice cures impotency and enhances sexual power.
- It balances the menstrual cycles.
- It is recommended especially for women after delivery.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by pregnant women or by those suffering from slip disc or sciatica problem. It should also be avoided by ulcer patients and people suffering from asthma.

SALAMBA SARVANGASANA

The name Salamba Sarvangasana comes from the Sanskrit words 'salamba' meaning supported, 'Sarva' meaning all and 'anga' meaning limb or bodypart, and 'asana' meaning posture. Thus 'salamba sarvangasana' literally translates to supported-all-limbs-pose.

Instructions: Start by lying flat on your back, keeping your legs together and your arms by your side. With one swift but easy movement, lift your legs, buttocks, and back, such that your elbows support your lower body and you stand high on your shoulders. Use your hands to support your back. As you settle down in the pose, make sure you move your elbows closer to each other. Straighten your spine and legs. Your body weight should lie on your shoulders and upper arms. Do not support your body on your neck or head. Firm up your legs and point your toes out. Hold the posture for about 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe deeply while you do so. If you feel any strain on your neck, release immediately. To release, lower your knees, and bring your hands to the floor. Then, lie flat and relax.

Benefits:

- It helps calm the brain, cures mild depression and relieves stress.
- It stimulates the prostate and the thyroid glands and the abdominal organs.
- It increases the blood flow to the internal organs and is very good for the digestive and the respiratory system. It cures digestive ailments and respiratory ailments like asthma and bronchitis.
- This asana relieves the symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from chronic fatigue and insomnia.
- It improves reproductive functions and improves fertility.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from high blood pressure and shoulder and neck injuries.





SALAMBA SIRASANA

The name of this asana is derived from the Sanskrit words 'salamba' meaning with support, 'sirsa', meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Place a soft blanket on the floor to cushion your head before you start the asana. Then, kneel down on the floor on your forearms and interlace your fingers. The forearms should be pressed firmly into the floor and the elbows spread out shoulder width apart. Place the crown of your head on the blanket in a manner that it fits against your clasped hands. Breathe in, lift your knees and tip toe towards your elbows. Lift your thighs and your sitting bones so that your body forms an inverted 'V'. Keep the torso straight and do not curve the spine. As you breathe out, lift your feet off the floor. It is important to lift both the feet together. You can keep the knees slightly bent as you push up. Slowly and without jerking, push your heels up towards the ceiling till the body is aligned in a straight line, perpendicular to the floor. Keep your tail bone tightly squeezed through the asana and balance your body on your forearms. Hold the pose for about 10 seconds initially and gradually increase it to a maximum of five minutes. Fold the legs at the knees while bringing the legs down to ease out of the pose.

Benefits:

- It stimulates and regulates the pineal and pituitary glands.
- It improves blood circulation and rejuvenates all the vital internal organs.
- It revitalizes the reproductive organs and is particularly beneficial for curing infertility and menopausal symptoms.
- It calms the mind and is very useful in stress relief.
- It rejuvenates the lungs and is useful in curing asthma and sinusitis.
- It tones the digestive system and improves its functioning.

Caution:

!Avoid this asana if you have a heart condition or are suffering from spinal, neck or shoulder injury.

!People with blood pressure should avoid the asana.

!This is an advanced pose and should be practiced under supervision only.

SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA

The term is derived from the Sanskrit words 'setu', meaning bridge, 'bandha' meaning lock, 'sarva' meaning all, 'anga' meaning limb and 'asana' meaning pose.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back with your arms placed on the sides palms facing downwards. Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor hip-width apart ensuring that the ankles and knees are placed in a straight line. Inhale and lift your back (lower, upper and middle) and the chest off the floor. Roll in your shoulders and make sure your chin touches your chest. Let your shoulders, feet and arms support your weight. Keep the buttocks squeezed firmly. The fingers can be interlaced and the clasped hand can be pressed firmly against the floor to help keep the torso raised. Hold the pose for 40-60 seconds. Breathe slowly and deeply as you hold the pose. Exhale and bring down the body slowly. Repeat the asana 4-5 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and stimulates the digestive system and forces elimination of toxins.
- It revitalizes the thyroid and the pituitary gland.
- It reduces depression, stress and anxiety and calms the brain.
- It provides relief from menstrual pain and symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, sinusitis, asthma, insomnia and osteoporosis.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from neck or spinal injuries and by pregnant women.





SUKHASANA

The name Sukhasana comes from the Sanskrit word 'sukham' which means easy/joyful and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit on the floor with legs stretched out. Fold the left leg and tuck the left foot into the right thigh and then fold the right leg and tuck the right foot into the left thigh. Cross the legs right across the groin. Keep the hands on your knees or in chin mudra (as in image) if you are using the posture for meditating. Sit erect keeping the spine straight and elongated. Focus on your breathing pattern. You may alternate the crossing of the legs on alternate days when practicing yoga regularly. Stay in the asana for at least 2-3 minutes.

Benefits:

- It is a very good pose for performing breathing exercises and for meditation.

Caution:

- It should be avoided by people suffering from knee or leg injuries.

SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA

The name Supta Baddha Konasana comes from four Sanskrit words: 'supta' meaning reclining, 'baddha' meaning bound, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on the ground with your arms by your side. Bend your knees and bring the heels of both feet close to the groin keeping the soles of both feet together. Your palms must lie next to your hips and pressed downwards. Exhale deeply by contracting the abdominal muscles and squeezing the tail bone upwards close to your pubic bone. Feel the stretch in your lower back and hold this position. Quickly inhale and as you exhale again, let your knees open up and give a good stretch to your inner thighs and the groin area. Do not arch your spine forcefully while breathing and keep your shoulders broad and away from the neck while doing the asana. Stay in the pose for up to a minute breathing deeply and slowly. Exhale and release the pose going back to the lying down position. Some might prefer to keep the palms facing upwards through the pose for greater relaxation.

Benefits:

- It calms and rejuvenates the digestive system and provides relief from irritable bowel syndrome.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and is useful in curing infertility and menstrual disorders and provides relief from symptoms of menopause.
- It activates the prostate gland, kidneys and bladder.
- It stretches the inner thighs, knees and the groin.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from mild depression and anxiety.
- It helps to open up the hips and flexes the hip flexors.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have knee, groin or hip injury and in case of lower back pain.
- Pregnant women should do this asana under supervision only and should keep their chest and head raised by placing a soft blanket.





ARDHA PINCHA MAYURASANA

The name Ardha Pincha Mayurasana comes from the Sanskrit words; 'ardha' meaning half, 'pincha' meaning feathers, 'mayura' meaning peacock and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Begin the asana by getting on your knees and hands. Place your forearms on the ground, making sure your elbows and shoulders are in the same line. Leave your hands flat on the ground or interlace your fingers. Lift your back and hips as you tuck your toes and press them hard against the floor. Straighten your legs. Your shoulder blades must be firm and broad and kept away from the ears. Walk in towards your arms till the torso forms an inverted V with your hips held higher towards the sky. The forearm should stay on the floor throughout the lifting process and the beginners may keep their knees slightly bent. Take deep breaths and hold the Position for 30 to 60 seconds. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It calms your mind and helps in relieving anxiety and depression.
- It stretches and tones the shoulders, calves and hamstrings.
- It tones and strengthens your arms and legs.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and reduces the symptoms of menopause and menstrual discomfort.
- It strengthens the bones and is beneficial in Osteoporosis.
- It stimulates and tones the abdominal area and the digestive organs and also improves digestion.
- It provides relief from insomnia, asthma, sciatica and flat feet.

Caution:

- It is best to avoid this asana if you have a neck, shoulder or lower back injury.

VRIKSHASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words; 'vriksha' meaning tree and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight with feet placed together. Focus the gaze on a fixed point in front of the body. Bend the right leg at the knee, clasp the ankle and place the sole of the foot with the toes pointing downward, on the inside of the left thigh close to the groin. Press the sole of the foot firmly into the thigh to help hold the position. Balance the body weight on the standing left leg and keep the core activated. Lengthen the spine, draw the shoulder blades towards each other to open the chest and keep the shoulders away from the ears and bring your hands in prayer position (anjali mudra) in front of your chest or above the head as in image. Hold the position for as long as you can. Release the hands and then the foot slowly. Come back to the starting position and practice on the other side. Do 2-3 sets.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the leg muscles and the hips.
- It tones and strengthens the ankles, the feet and the knees.
- It strengthens the bones of the hips and legs due to the weight-bearing nature of the pose.
- It helps to build self-confidence and esteem and helps build concentration and focus.
- It gives tranquillity and provides relief from anxiety and depression.
- It helps to cure rheumatic pain and also treats numbness.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from high or low blood pressure, migraine, insomnia and knee, ankle or hip injuries.





BALASANA

This asana gets its name from the Sanskrit words 'bala' that means child and 'asana' which means posture. This asana resembles the foetal position.

Instructions: Kneel down on the floor and ensure that your big toes touch each other as you sit on your heels. Once you are comfortable, spread your knees hip-width apart. Inhale deeply and while exhaling bend your torso forward laying it comfortably between your thighs as you exhale. Stretch the tailbone away from the back of the pelvis as you lift the base of your head slightly away from the back of the neck. Stretch your arms forward and place them in front of you, such that they are in line with your knees. You can extend your arms in front with palms facing up to intensify the stretch or extend your arms behind next to your hips (as in the image). Sink the front of your shoulder to the floor. You must feel the weight of the front shoulders pulling the blades widely across your back. Hold this position for as long as you want focusing on your breathing pattern.

Benefits:

- It calms the mind and helps in reducing stress and anxiety.
- It helps release tension in the chest, back and shoulders.
- It helps to massage and flex the internal organs in the body.
- This asana helps to stretch and lengthen the spine and stimulates digestion and elimination.
- It promotes blood circulation throughout the body.
- It stretches and tones the tendons, muscles and ligaments in the knee area.
- It increases blood circulation to the head and provides relief from headaches and migraines.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you are suffering from diarrhoea, knee injuries or high blood pressure.

SAVASANA

The Sanskrit name Savasana is derived from the Sanskrit words 'sava' meaning corpse and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back with your legs parted at shoulder width. Spread your arms out slightly at a comfortable distance on your sides keeping your palms facing up. Close your eyes gently and focus on your breathing pattern. Breathe deeply and slowly through the nostrils. Once comfortable in the pose, start focussing on relaxing from your toes to your head in a sequence. Don't move up till the lower parts are completely relaxed. With each inhalation and exhalation, imagine your muscles becoming stress free and relaxed. Imagine all stress and tension dissolving and being thrown out with each exhalation. Once the body is fully relaxed, stay in the posture for at least 3-5 minutes.

Benefits:

- It relaxes the body and calms the mind.
- It provides relief from stress, fatigue and depression.
- It improves concentration.
- It is very helpful in curing insomnia.
- It is excellent for stimulating blood circulation.
- It is very beneficial for people suffering from hypertension, neurological disorders, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome and diabetes.

Caution:

- None. Anybody can do this asana easily.





URDHVA PRASARITA PADASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words; 'urdhva' meaning upwards, 'prasarita' meaning extended, 'pada' meaning foot and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie straight on the floor on your back with your arms along your sides or extend them outwards. Keep the legs extended and feet together. Exhale and contract your core abdominal muscles, draw the navel into the spine and press the sides of the waist into the floor and raise your legs together vertically upward without bending, making a right angle with the floor. Squeeze your tail bone down as your legs go up. Beginners can bend their knees and bring the heels close to the hips before unfolding and raising them straight up. Hold the position for 20-40 seconds and then lower the legs without bending a third way down (without jerking and without touching the floor) and again take them back to the 90 degree position. Inhale as you come down and exhale as you go up. You can repeat this action 5-10 times. Do not raise the back and the lower hip from the floor as you do this asana.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the core abdominal muscles and reduces abdominal fat.
- It improves lumbar spine strength.
- It improves flexibility of the hip flexors.
- It improves digestion and elimination.
- It strengthens the Manipura chakra that improves self-discipline and will power.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons with lower back injuries and sciatica.
- Pregnant and menstruating women should also avoid this asana.

UTTANA SHISHOSANA

The name comes from Sanskrit words 'uttana' which means an intense stretch, 'shisho' refers to a little puppy and 'asana' means a posture.

Instructions: Get on your fours into the tabletop position, with your wrists directly placed under the shoulders and your knees directly aligned below the hips. On an exhalation, keeping your palms firmly pressed against the floor, walk your hands away from the body in a straight line and begin to lower your chest towards the floor or ground till such time the forehead touches the mat. Spread your fingers and press palms firmly into the mat and make sure that the shoulders are broad, arms are lowered and the sitting bones point towards the ceiling. Do not spread the bent legs beyond the hips to avoid straining the back and neck. Hold the pose for as long as you can breathing calmly. Release the pose by walking your hands back to tabletop position.

Benefits:

- It gives a good stretch to the shoulders and spine.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from chronic stress and anxiety.
- It makes the spine flexible.
- It provides relief from insomnia.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from knee or lower back injuries.





YOGA FOR WEIGHT LOSS

The physical sheath of the Annamaya Kosha can never be strong if it is full of fat. The obesity issue is not about vanity alone; it is the issue of our health and our physical and emotional well-being. Billions of dollars are forked out across the world by people looking for a magical quick fix for their weight issues, yet the majority continue to struggle. Novelty fad diets and surgical procedures lead to fast - sometimes dramatic - weight loss, but only for the pounds to creep back on again because they don't address the underlying reasons why a person is overweight in the first place. "yoga is the union of body, mind and soul". Thus, it approaches the weight loss issue in a more holistic manner. If the mind is disturbed, it effects the body and vice versa. Regular practice of Yoga tends to have a positive impact on the brain function. It reduces the stress hormone- 'cortisol' levels and optimizes body functions and metabolism. Moreover, regular Yoga practice requires discipline, physical and mental strength and flexibility, all of which in turn make us more mindful of our mind and body balance, triggering a positive tone that helps us lose weight faster. Yoga transforms you from the inside out, pushing you to make positive lifestyle alterations and healthier food choices ensuing in weight loss. The following pages cover some basic Yoga poses that can help control obesity, cut the fat and keep the body healthy.



ANANTASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘ananta ‘ meaning the infinite one, derived from the name of the thousand-headed serpent head upon which Vishnu rested at the bottom of the primordial ocean, ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie on the floor on your right side. Stretch your right arm and leg straight out along the floor so that the heels, hips and the shoulder are in one line. Bend your right elbow and support your head in your palm. Ensure that the elbow is kept away from the body and the armpit is stretched. Exhale and raise the left leg upwards rotating it slightly so that the toes point toward the ceiling and the knee towards your torso. Raise the left arm and clasp the left big toe with your index and middle fingers. Secure the grip by wrapping the thumb around the two fingers. Breathe calmly and stay in the pose for 40-60 seconds. Then, release and wait for a few moments. Repeat this pose as you turn to your left side, and do it with your right leg for the same amount of time. Do three rounds at least.

Benefits:

- It tones the abdominal muscles and improves digestion.
- It stretches and helps reduce fat around the waist, legs and the hips.
- It increase the flexibility of the spine and the leg muscles.
- It stretched and strengthens the hamstrings and the pelvic region.
- It this helps cure hypertension, arthritis, colitis, hypertension and sciatica.
- It helps relieve stress and tension.
- It helps cure disorders related to the uterus, urinary bladder, ovaries and the prostate.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this asana if you have pain in your neck or shoulders. All persons with spinal issues must do the asana under supervision.

MALASANA

The Sanskrit word 'malasana' comes from two words, 'mala' meaning garland and 'asana' meaning pose.

Instructions: Stand with your feet apart (2 feet) and turn your toes out slightly. Keep your gaze forward and your spine straight as you push your hips back and lower down as if into a chair, pressing the feet into the floor with your body weight evenly balanced on both feet. The goal is to bring the hips as low as you can without rounding the spine. If you can't lower down without your heels lifting off the mat, roll up a towel or blanket and place it beneath the heels. Bring your hands to prayer position in the mid-chest area. You may push into the inner knees with your elbows, further opening your hips. Hold the pose for a few breaths and raise the body to original standing pose while inhaling.

Benefits:

- It helps open and strengthen the hips, inner thighs and lengthens the spine.
- It keeps the pelvic and hip joints healthy.
- It tones the abdominal muscles and improves the function of the colon to help with elimination.
- It increases circulation and blood flow in the pelvis, which can help regulate sexual energy.
- It improves balance, concentration and focus.
- It is particularly beneficial for pregnant women as it aids in childbirth.

Caution:

- Avoid the pose if you have knee injuries.
- Don't stay in the pose if you have pain in the groins.





CRESCENT LUNGE - ANJANEYASANA

The Sanskrit word Anjaneyasana is derived from Lord Hanuman's mother's name - Anjani.

Instructions: Start in downward-facing dog. From there, exhale and step your right foot forward between your hands. Make sure your right knee is directly over your right ankle to protect the knee joint. Slowly lower your left knee to touch the floor, placing the top of that foot flat on the floor. Slide the left leg back until you feel a comfortable stretch in the front thigh and groin. Make sure to keep your right knee fixed in place as you do this. As you exhale, gradually take the lunge deeper by allowing the right knee to move slightly in front of the ankle.

Now, inhale and lift your torso upright while sweeping your arms out to your sides and up overhead. Your arms should be straight and perpendicular to the floor. Your head should tilt back slightly with the chin lifted. Keep your core engaged. Hold the pose for as long as you can. Exhale and bring your torso down gently and place your hands on the floor on each side of your right foot. Turn the toes of the left foot back under and exhale and steadily lift your left knee off of the floor and step back to downward-facing dog. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Releases tension and strengthens your hips and the quadriceps and gluteus muscles.
- Stretches your hamstrings, quads and groin.
- Strengthens your knees.
- Relieves sciatica pain.
- Expands your chest, lungs and shoulders.
- Improves your balance, concentration and core awareness.
- Calms the mind.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have knee injury or have high blood pressure.

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

The asana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath. The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'ardha' meaning half, 'matsya' meaning fish, 'indra' meaning king and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the feet together and the spine erect. Bend the left leg and place the heel of the left foot beside the right knee. Place the right hand on the raised left knee and the left hand behind you. You may keep the other leg straight or bend and tucked below the left buttock. Twist the waist, shoulders and neck in this sequence to the left and look over the shoulder. Keep the spine erect. Hold this asana for as long as you can (approx. 30-60 seconds and breathe in and out gently throughout). Breathing out, gently ease out of the asana. Repeat on the other side. Do at least 4 sets.

Benefits:

- It increases the elasticity of the spine, tones the spinal nerves and improves spinal strength.
- It massages the abdominal and other internal organs and improves digestion and elimination of wastes.
- It relaxes the hip joints relieving stiffness.
- It stimulates the Manipura chakra.
- It opens the chest and increases the oxygen supply to the lungs.
- It relieves symptoms of backache, fatigue, menstrual discomfort and sciatica.
- It stimulates the liver, heart, lungs, kidneys and spleen.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by women during pregnancy and menstruation.
- It should be avoided by people who have had heart, abdominal, spinal or vertebral surgeries and by people suffering from peptic ulcers or hernia.





ARDHA PINCHA MAYURASANA

The name Ardha Pincha Mayurasana comes from the Sanskrit words; 'ardha' meaning half, 'pincha' meaning feathers, 'mayura' meaning peacock and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Begin the asana by getting on your knees and hands. Place your forearms on the ground, making sure your elbows and shoulders are in the same line. Leave your hands flat on the ground or interlace your fingers. Lift your back and hips as you tuck your toes and press them hard against the floor. Straighten your legs. Your shoulder blades must be firm and broad and kept away from the ears. Walk in towards your arms till the torso forms an inverted V with your hips held higher towards the sky. The forearm should stay on the floor throughout the lifting process and the beginners may keep their knees slightly bent. Take deep breaths and hold the Position for 30 to 60 seconds. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It calms your mind and helps in relieving anxiety and depression.
- It stretches and tones the shoulders, calves and hamstrings.
- It tones and strengthens your arms and legs.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and reduces the symptoms of menopause and menstrual discomfort.
- It strengthens the bones and is beneficial in Osteoporosis.
- It stimulates and tones the abdominal area and the digestive organs and also improves digestion.
- It provides relief from insomnia, asthma, sciatica and flat feet.

Caution:

- It is best to avoid this asana if you have a neck, shoulder or lower back injury.

ARDHA SALBHASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words; 'ardha' meaning half, 'shalabh' which means grasshopper and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach with your chin placed on the floor, legs straight with heels and the knees placed close to each other and arms stretched forward. Inhale and raise one leg and the opposite arm together. Ensure that the shoulder stays aligned with the ear and the raised leg should remain centred and not be stretched outside the centre alignment of the hips. Hold the pose for 15-30 seconds. Exhale and lower the raised leg and arm. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the muscles of the arms, shoulders, abdomen and the spine.
- It reduces fat in the thighs and the hips.
- It revitalises the digestive system and regulates the functioning of the liver and the kidney.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from anxiety and mild depression.
- It stimulates the muladhara (root) chakra, which is said to represent the beginning of life and regulates vitality, stability and promotes balance.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia or an enlarged thyroid.





BADDHA KONASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'baddha' meaning bound, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and stretch your legs out. Elevate your hips slightly by placing a soft blanket under your hip bones in case you feel any discomfort sitting directly on the floor. Exhale and bend your knees pulling your heels towards your pelvis. Press the soles of your feet close together, and let your knees drop to the sides. Push the outer edges of your feet firmly into the floor and wrap your hands around your feet or ankles. With the pelvis in a neutral position, gently work the outer knees towards the floor. Never force your knees down. Always ensure that the spine is erect, neck long and the shoulder blades be drawn away from the ears. This pose can be held anywhere from 1-10 minutes. To exit the pose, draw your knees towards one another, extend your legs and return to the sitting pose. Your knees should never ever be forced towards the ground.

Benefits :

- It stimulates and tones the abdominal organs, ovaries, prostate gland, bladder and kidneys.
- It stretches the inner thighs, groins and knees.
- It helps relieve mild depression, anxiety and fatigue.
- It eases menstrual discomfort and sciatica.
- It provides relief from the symptoms of menopause.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from knee injury.

BHARADVAJASANA

The asana dedicated to sage Bharadvaja who was one of the Saptarshis (seven greatest sages) Bharadvaja was also the father of Drona who was a master of advanced military arts and the royal guru to Kauravas, Pandavas and the Devastras, the princes who fought the epic battle of the Mahabharata.

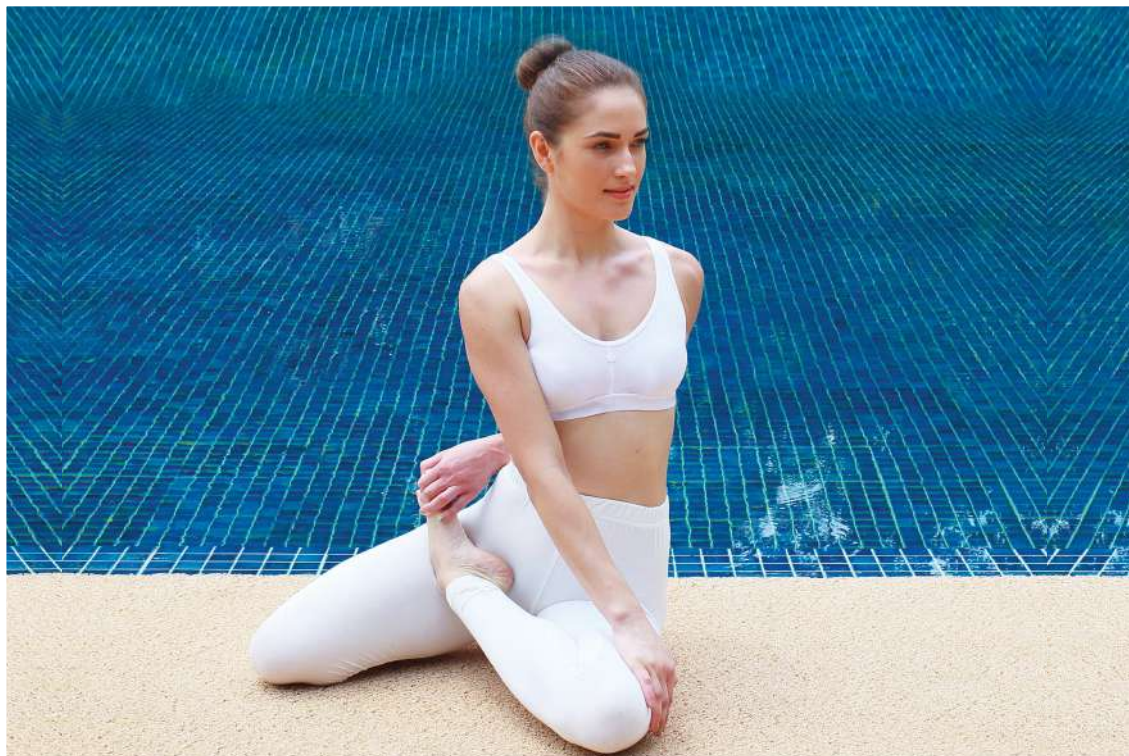
Instructions: Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you. Place your arms in a resting position at your sides. Bend your knees and bring them toward your left hip, such that the weight of your body is now resting on your right buttock. You may rest the inner side of your right ankle on the inner left thigh. Inhale slowly and stretch your spine to lengthen it as much as possible. Then, exhale slowly and twist your upper trunk to the maximum extent possible towards the right. You may keep your right hand on the floor and your left hand will rest on the outer part of the thigh of your right leg. Ensure that the hip on your left side presses down the weight of the body on the floor and is not raised while twisting. Try to apply a lengthening force to your spine with each breath, and twist your body further with each exhalation. Turning your head, look out over the shoulder on your right. Remain in this pose for a minute. Exhale slowly and gently untwist your trunk to revert to come back to the centre twisted position. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- It gives the hips, spine, and shoulders a good stretch and strengthens the muscles.
- It tones and reduces the fat from the waist and the abdomen.
- It massages the internal organs, improves digestion and metabolism.
- It provides relief from neck pain, sciatica and lower back pain.
- It reduces stress and anxiety.
- It provides relief from carpal tunnel syndrome.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons suffering from spinal and hip injuries.
- Women should avoid this asana during menstruation.
- Avoid this asana if you have low or high blood pressure.





BHUJANGASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bhujanga' meaning snake and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach with the hands placed on the sides and with your feet and heels lightly touching each other. Place your hands, palm downwards under the shoulders with the elbows firmly tucked close to/into the torso while keeping the navel on the floor. Now, placing your body's weight on your palms, inhale and raise your head and trunk. Note that your arms should be bent at your elbows when the body is raised. The neck should be arched upwards and backwards, the shoulder blades should be firm and held away from the ears. Make sure you put equal pressure on both your palms. This position can be held for 15-20 counts and then lowered while exhaling to the original position. One can do an advanced raise by straightening the arm and arching the back as much as possible. Breathing out, gently bring your abdomen, chest and head back to the floor.

Benefits:

- It tones the abdomen and strengthens the spine, back and shoulders.
- It improves flexibility of the upper and middle back.
- It expands the chest and lungs and gives the shoulders and abdomen a good stretch.
- It improves blood circulation and stimulates the digestive, reproductive and urinary systems.
- It reduces fatigue and stress.
- It provides relief from sciatica and asthma.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this asana if you are pregnant, have fractured ribs or wrists or have undergone any abdominal surgeries in the recent past.
- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from Carpel Tunnel Syndrome or have spinal disorders.

HALASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words 'hala' meaning plow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie straight on your back, feet together with your arms placed beside your body and your palms facing downwards. Inhale and lift your feet and hips and waist (in that order) off the ground using your abdominal muscles. Your legs should be at a 90-degree angle from the floor. Use your hands to support your hips and legs. Bend your legs from the hips so that they are parallel to the floor and take them beyond your head without bending the legs and press the toes into the mat. Gaze at the navel and Keep the neck long and the shoulders broad. The weight of the lifted part of the body should be borne by the shoulders without putting any pressure on the neck. The hands can continue to support the raised hips or can be outstretched and clasped together as in figure. Remain in the posture for 40-60 seconds while focussing on your breathing pattern. Exhale and gently bring down your legs, waist and torso without jerking.

Benefits:

- It regulates metabolism and helps in weight loss.
- It massages the digestive organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- It removes toxins from the urinary and the digestive tract.
- It regulates the working of the thyroid and the pituitary gland.
- It is known to regulate sugar levels and hence is very good for diabetics.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and provides relief from infertility and symptoms of menopause.
- It helps reduce stress and fatigue.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons suffering from neck or spinal injury, diarrhoea or high blood pressure.
- Women should avoid the asana during their menstruation and pregnancy.





GARUDASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'garuda' meaning eagle and 'asana' meaning posture. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports God Vishnu and helps humanity fight against demons.

Instructions: Stand erect. Gently bend your right knee, and wrap your left leg around your right, such that the knees are stacked over each other. Your left foot must touch your right shin. Raise your arms to the shoulder height and wrap your right hand around your left. Ensure that your elbows are bent at 90-degree angles and are also stacked. Slowly turn the hands so that the palms face each other. Balance the body well and lower the hips gently without leaning on either side. Hold the pose for a few seconds. Breathe deeply and slowly. Focus on the third eye (between the eyebrows on the forehead) and let go of your negative emotions. Release the pose, switch the limbs and repeat.

Benefits:

- It stretches and tones the hips, thighs, shoulders and upper back.
- It improves balance and strengthens the calves.
- It provides relief from sciatica and rheumatism.
- It increases the flexibility of the limbs.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this pose if you have had a recent knee, ankle or elbow injury.

DHANURASANA

Dhanurasana is derived from the Sanskrit word 'dhanur' meaning a bow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach, keeping your feet hip-width apart and your arms beside your body. Now, gently fold your knees and hold your ankles. While inhaling raise the thighs, head and chest as high as possible balancing the weight of the body on the lower abdomen. Join the ankles. Look upward and breathe normally and hold the pose for 15-20 seconds. Exhale and release the pose.

Benefits:

- It strengthens your shoulders, arms, neck, abdomen, back, thighs & hamstring muscles.
- It energizes the body
- It helps improve stomach disorders.
- It helps in reducing abdominal fat.
- It regulates the pancreas and is recommended for people with diabetes.
- It expands the thoracic region of the chest.
- It alleviates a hunchback.
- It increases the appetite.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from high blood pressure, back pain, headache or migraine.
- It is strictly prohibited for people who have undergone abdominal surgery.
- Should be avoided by women during pregnancy and menstruation.





MARICHYASANA: SEATED SPINAL TWIST

This asana is named after the famous sage, Marichi, believed to be the son of Brahma and leader of the Maruts, the storm warrior gods. 'Marichi' is a Sanskrit word which means light beam and 'asana' means posture.

Instructions: Sit on your mat with your legs extended in front of you. Your upper torso and lower body should be at right angles to each other. The shoulders should be relaxed, spine straight and the rib cage should be lifted up. Bend your right knee and place your right foot flat on the floor besides the left knee. Keep your left leg extended and rotated slightly inwards with the thigh pressed downwards on the floor. Extend and take a deep breath and as you exhale, twist your torso towards the right extending the right arm behind you (behind the right glute), with the palm on the floor to help maintain your balance. Your left arm should be bent with the hand pointing upwards. Place the bent left elbow in the outer crook of the bent right knee. Beginners can hold on to their outer right knee with the left hand. Do not allow the right leg to be pushed either outwards or inwards from its original position. Maintain your weight equally on both of your sitting bones. Hold the pose for at least 30 seconds. Return to the seated position and repeat the pose in the opposite direction to complete a set. Do 5 sets, gradually increasing the duration of each set.

Benefits:

- It increases the flexibility and strength of the spine and the shoulder muscles.
- It massages the internal organs and glands making them function effectively.
- It opens up the breathing passages and the lungs.
- It rejuvenates the abdominal muscles and the digestive system.
- It calms the brain and relaxes the mind.
- It helps ease menstrual pain.

Caution:

- Please do not do this asana if you suffer from a spinal injury or have a degenerative disc disease.
- Avoid this asana if you have a heart condition or are suffering from spinal, neck or shoulder injury.
- People with blood pressure should avoid the asana.
- This is an advanced pose and should be practiced under supervision only.

PARIPURNA NAVASANA / NAUKASANA

The name Naukasana is derived from two Sanskrit words; 'nauka' meaning boat and 'asana' meaning posture.

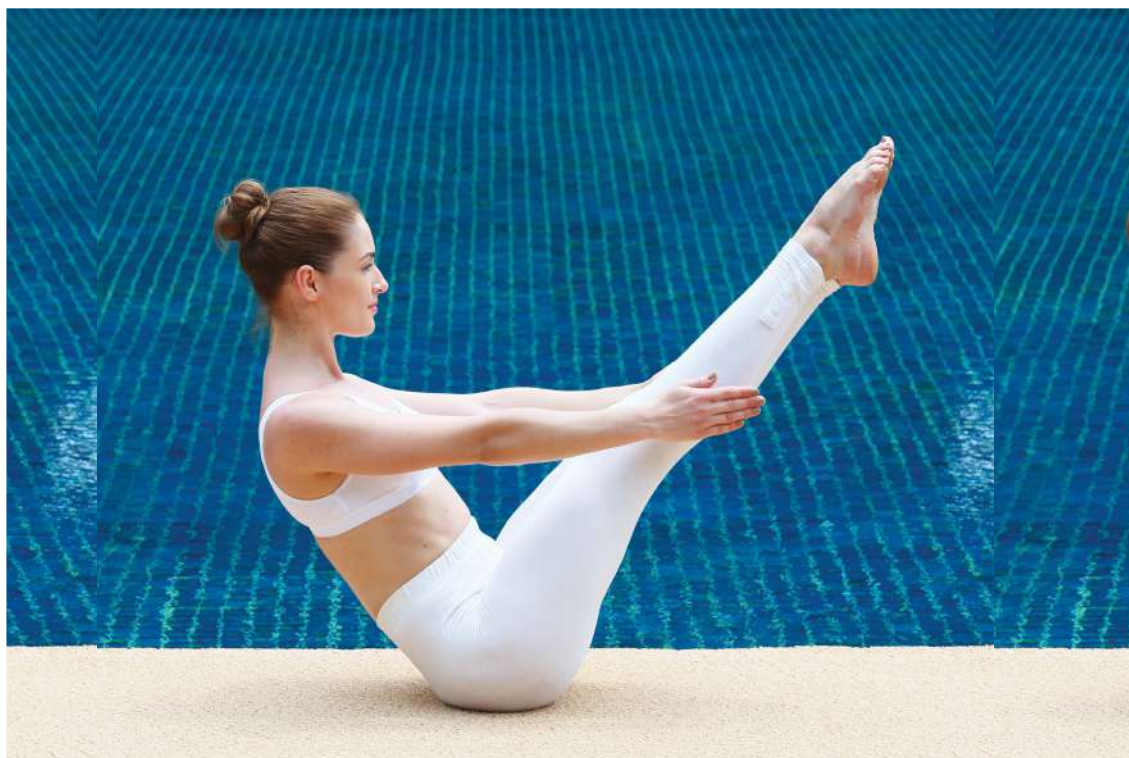
Lie flat on your back on the yoga mat with your arms by your side, relax and breathe normally. Inhale deeply and raise your legs and torso, both approximately 45 – 60-degree angle from the floor and keep your arms stretched towards the feet as shown in the image. Keep the legs straight and feel the tension in the area around the navel. Your eyes, fingers and toes should be in a line. Hold your breath and the posture for 10-15 seconds. You can increase the time of holding posture by practicing regularly. Exhale slowly as you get to the starting position. Repeat the asana 4-5 times.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the back and abdominal muscles and reduces belly fat.
- Tones the leg and arm muscles.
- Useful for people with hernia.
- It improves circulation of blood in the abdominal area and the intestines and improves digestion.
- It regulates the function of the internal organs specially the liver, kidneys, pancreas and the prostate glands.
- It stretches the hamstrings and strengthens the spine and hip flexors.
- It stimulates the kidneys, thyroid and prostate glands.
- It helps in stress relief.

Caution:

- Do not practice this yoga pose if you have low blood pressure, severe headache, migraine, or if you have suffered from some chronic diseases or spinal disorders in the recent past.
- Asthma and heart patients are advised to avoid this pose.
- Women should avoid doing this pose during pregnancy and during the first two days of the menstrual cycle
- Do not practice this yoga pose if you have low blood pressure, severe headache, migraine, or if you have suffered from some chronic diseases or spinal disorders in the recent past.
- Asthma and heart patients are advised to avoid this pose.
- Women should avoid doing this pose during pregnancy and during the first two days of the menstrual cycle.





PADANGUSTHASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit 'pada' meaning foot, 'angustha' meaning big toe and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand upright with your feet shoulder width apart and the arms raised up. Tighten your front thigh muscles and keeping your legs completely straight, exhale and bend forward from your hip joints keeping your torso straight. Bend your torso and head as one unit and bring the arms down and bend the elbows out to the sides. Slide and hook the fingers under the feet and grip the big toes firmly. Press your toes down firmly against your fingers and press the your forehead into your shins. Keep the torso straight and do not curve the back while getting into the pose and while in it. Hold the pose for a minute breathing calmly. Inhale and lift the body to the original position making sure your torso and head comes back to a standing position as a single unit. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and improves the digestive system and elimination of wastes.
- It stimulates the liver and kidneys and helps in better removal of toxins.
- It helps in reducing stress and anxiety.
- It tones and strengthens the calves and hamstrings.
- It provides relief from menopause and menstrual disorders.
- It provides relief from headaches and insomnia.

Caution:

- It should be avoided by people suffering from lower back injuries.

PARSVOTTANASANA

The name is derived from Sanskrit words; 'parsva' meaning side or flank 'uttan' meaning an intense stretch and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight with both your feet 3 ½ -4 feet apart. Rest your hands on your hips. Turn your left foot in 45 to 60 degrees to the right and your right foot out to the right by 90 degrees in such a way that the right heel is aligned with the left heel. Bend your right knee outward so that the right knee cap is in line with the right ankle and not ahead or behind it. Exhale and twist your torso to the right, squaring the front of your pelvis as much as possible with the front edge of your mat. Inhale and then exhale and bend the torso forward from the hip joints over the right leg keeping the torso straight. Do not bend from the waist or curve it. Stop when the torso is parallel to the floor and press your fingertips to the floor on either side of the right foot or clasp them behind your back as in image. Keep the left leg stretched straight while in the posture. You can deepen the bend and go down further in case you can without curving your back and clasp the right foot to balance. Hold this asana for 30-40 seconds. Inhale and raise the torso from the hip joint without curving the back and straightening the legs to go to starting position and repeat on the other side. Repeat 3-4 sets.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the waist, legs, hamstrings and hips.
- It helps in trimming the fat around the waist.
- It stimulates the digestive system and improves digestion and absorption.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and provides relief from menstrual and menopausal symptoms.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from stress and anxiety.

Caution:

- Do not do this asana if you have a knee, hip or a spinal injury or if you have high blood pressure.





RAJAKAPOTASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘raja’ meaning king, ‘kapota’ meaning pigeon and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Set on your fours, making sure your knees are placed right under your hips and your hands a little ahead of your shoulders. Now, gently slide your left knee forward. While you do this, place the left shin under your torso, and bring your left foot in front of your right knee. The outsides of your left shin must rest on the floor. Slide your right leg to the back gently. Lower the outsides of your left buttocks on the floor. Place your left heels in front of your right hip. You can angle your left knee towards the left, such that it is slightly outside the line of the hip. Your right leg should extend itself straight out of the hip to avoid putting undue pressure on the spine and lower back. Rotate it inwards, such that its midline is pressed against the floor. Take a deep breath, and as you exhale, bend your right leg at the knees with the right foot pointing towards the sky. Gently push your torso back and stretch as much as you can. Clasp the toes of your raised foot with both hands by raising the arms above the head and folding them at the elbows or as in image. Push the chest and the rib cage upwards while bending backwards. Stay in this position for at least a minute or for as long as you can. Gently bring the hands down and bring the right foot down and ease out of the pose. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- It stretches and tones most parts of the abdomen and the lower body.
- It massages the abdominal organs and improves digestion.
- It strengthens and tones the spine.
- It opens up the hip area and the chest.
- It provides relief from stress and anxiety.
- It stimulates and strengthens the urinary and reproductive systems.

Caution:

- This asana should be practiced under supervision and should be avoided by beginners.
- Avoid this asana if you have a leg, hip, Groin spinal injury.
- Should be avoided by pregnant and menstruating women.

SALABHASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'shalabh' which means grasshopper and 'asana' meaning a posture.

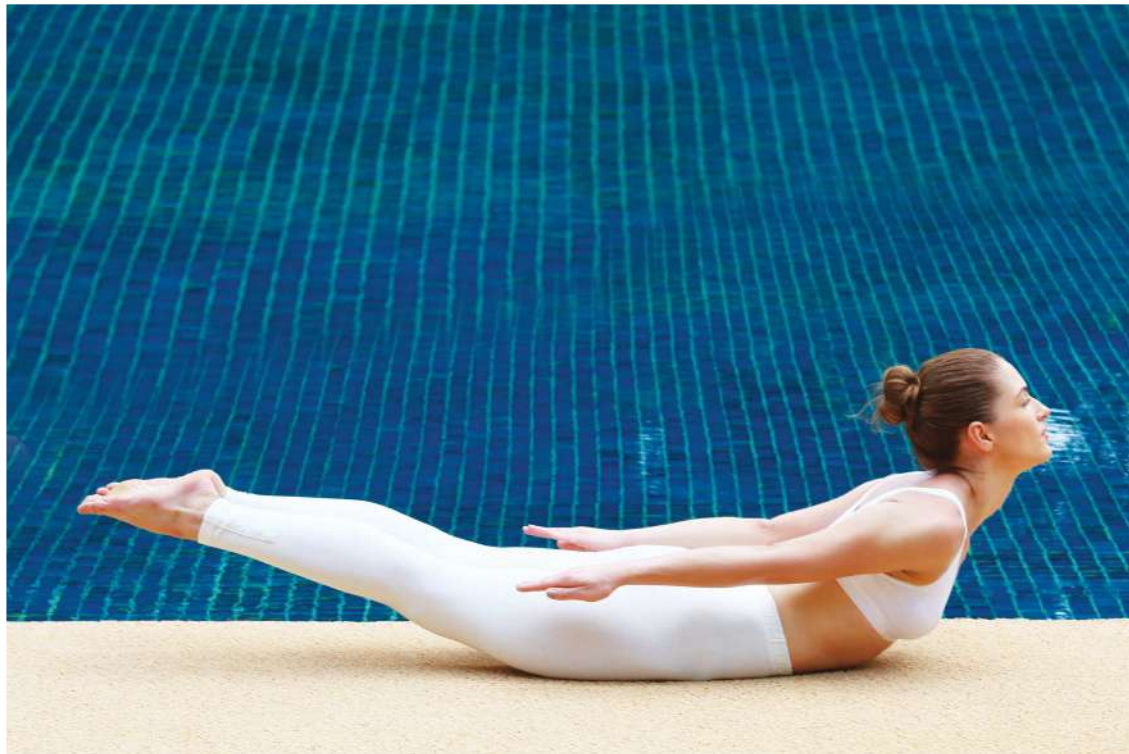
Instructions: Lie on your belly with your arms on the sides palms up, forehead resting on the floor. Turn your big toes toward each other and rotate the thighs slightly inwards and make the buttocks firm. Inhale and lift your head, upper torso, arms and legs away from the floor. Use the back muscles to lift the chest up and do not put pressure on the neck. You'll be resting on your lower ribs, belly and front pelvis. Keep the buttocks and the leg muscles firm and the big toes turned toward each other. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and stretch back actively through your fingertips increasing the stretch. Push the shoulders away from the ears and towards each other and keep the upper arms engaged. List the head up gently without jutting out the chin and putting pressure on the neck. Gaze forward or slightly upward. Stay in the pose for 30- 60 seconds. Exhale and release the pose. Repeat 2-3 times.

Benefits:

- It regulates metabolism and helps you lose weight.
- It helps in reducing fat from the stomach.
- It activates the kidneys, liver and the reproductive organs.
- It invigorates the entire body, stimulates the internal organs and enhances blood circulation.
- It regulates the acid-base balance in the body.
- It strengthens and tones the arms, thighs, shoulders, legs, calf muscles and hips.
- It tones and rejuvenates the spine.
- It helps reduce stress and tension.
- It helps in curing constipation, gas troubles, indigestion, dysentery, acidity and other abdominal disorders.
- It helps in the prevention of piles.

Caution:

- Should be avoided in case of lower back injury.





SALAMBA SARVANGASANA

The name Salamba Sarvangasana comes from the Sanskrit words ‘salamba’ meaning supported, ‘Sarva’ meaning all and ‘anga’ meaning limb or bodypart, and ‘asana’ meaning posture. Thus ‘salamba sarvangasana’ literally translates to supported-all-limbs-pose.

Instructions: Start by lying flat on your back, keeping your legs together and your arms by your side. With one swift but easy movement, lift your legs, buttocks, and back, such that your elbows support your lower body and you stand high on your shoulders. Use your hands to support your back. As you settle down in the pose, make sure you move your elbows closer to each other. Straighten your spine and legs. Your body weight should lie on your shoulders and upper arms. Do not support your body on your neck or head. Firm up your legs and point your toes out. Hold the posture for about 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe deeply while you do so. If you feel any strain on your neck, release immediately. To release, lower your knees, and bring your hands to the floor. Then, lie flat and relax.

Benefits:

- It helps calm the brain, cures mild depression and relieves stress.
- It stimulates the prostate and the thyroid glands and the abdominal organs.
- It increases the blood flow to the internal organs and is very good for the digestive and the respiratory system. It cures digestive ailments and respiratory ailments like asthma and bronchitis.
- This asana relieves the symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from chronic fatigue and insomnia.
- It improves reproductive functions and improves fertility.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from high blood pressure and shoulder and neck injuries.

UTTANASANA

The name is derived from Sanskrit words, 'uttana' meaning an intense stretch and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight and rest your hands on your hips. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints keeping the knees soft. Do not bend from the waist and keep the torso straight as you bend forward. You might have to move your hips slightly as you bend forward to avoid losing balance. Keep your sitting bones/hips pointing towards the ceiling and do not let them slouch. Let your hands rest on the ground, in front of or next to your feet. The legs should be parallel to each other maximum shoulder width apart and the toes should point forward. The chest should press against the thighs, the neck should be long and the head can dangle with the chin close to the knees and your gaze fixed between your legs. Hold the pose for as long as you can, breathing calmly. Feel the fold and the stretch from your hip bone and the hamstrings. To release the pose, inhale lift the torso up from the hip bone without curving your back contracting the core and the hip muscles and pressing the tailbone down firmly without curving or rolling the spine or the neck. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and revitalizes the digestive system and improves digestion and elimination.
- It activates the liver and the kidneys.
- It stretches and strengthens the back, hips, calves and the hamstrings.
- It helps to reduce stress and provides relief from anxiety.
- It provides relief from headaches and insomnia.
- It gives relief in menopause and from menstrual problems.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, asthma, sinusitis and osteoporosis.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and helps cure infertility.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have lower back or hamstring injuries or if you suffer from sciatica or glaucoma.





UPAVISTHA KONASANA

The term comes from the Sanskrit words 'upavistha' meaning seated, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and keep the spine straight with the legs straight in front of you. Lean your torso back slightly on your hands and slide both the legs outwards in such a manner that they spread on the sides of the pelvis (the legs should form a 90 degree angle with the pelvis as in the image). Press your hands against the floor and slide your buttocks forward, widening the legs another 10 to 20 degrees. If you feel uncomfortable, raise the buttocks slightly by placing a folded blanket under the buttocks. Let your toes point upwards. The knee caps of the outstretched legs should point straight up toward the ceiling. Now with your buttocks pressed heavily into the floor and your knee caps pointing up at the ceiling, walk your hands forward between your legs as you exhale gently. Keep your arms long. As with all forward bends, the emphasis is on moving from the hip joints and maintaining the length of the front torso. Do not bend from the waist or curve it. Always bend forward from the hip keeping the torso straight. Stay in the pose for a minute or so breathing calmly. Inhale, raise the torso and release the pose gently. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It gives a very good stretch to the hips, legs, the abductor muscles of the groin and the hamstrings.
- It tones and detoxifies the internal organs and improves digestion.
- It soothes the mind and helps reduce stress and anxiety.
- It provides relief from sciatica and arthritis.
- It detoxifies the kidneys.
- It activates the core muscles.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from lower spine, groin, hip or hamstring injuries.
- This asana should be avoided by pregnant or menstruating women.

TRIKONASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'trikona' meaning a triangle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand with your feet wide apart (approximately 3 1/2 to 4 feet). Turn the right foot out at 90 degrees and the left foot in by approximately 45 degrees. Ensure that the heels stay in line with the hips and that the centre of your right heel with the centre of your arch of left foot are aligned. The weight of the body should be equally balanced on both the feet. Inhale deeply and stretch your arms sideways with the palms facing downwards at shoulder height. As you exhale bend your body downwards to the right from the hip keeping the waist straight. While bending extend your left hand straight towards the ceiling air and bring the right hand towards the floor ensuring that both the hands are opposite to each other in a straight line. Rest your right hand on your shin, ankle or the floor outside your right foot, whatever is comfortable without losing balance. Turn your head slightly upwards to gaze at the palm/ thumb of the raised hand. Breathe normally and hold the position for as long as you can. As you inhale come up to the original position and repeat on the other side. Repeat the asana 4-5 times on each side.

Benefits:

- Burns fat particularly in the waist area and the thighs.
- Strengthens and stretches the hips, back, arms, thighs and leg.
- Reduces blood pressure, stress and anxiety.
- Improves blood circulation and digestion and stimulates the kidney function.
- Gives flexibility to groins, hamstrings and hips.
- Improves the body balance and increases concentration.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by people with blood pressure problems and pregnant women.
- People suffering from spinal disorders should avoid this asana or do it under strict supervision.





PHYSICAL WARRIOR I - VIRABHADRASANA I

Virabhadrasana I Pose I is an asana commemorating the exploits of a mythical warrior.

Instructions: Stand straight with your legs hip-distance apart and arms on your sides. Now, turn your right foot outwards by 90 degrees and the left by 15 degrees, making sure the heel of the right foot is perfectly aligned with the center of the left foot. Lift your arms sideways to shoulder height, stretch them out straight with palms facing downwards. Twist your body to the right completely. Exhale and bend your right knee, such that your knee and ankle form a straight line. The right upper leg should be at right angle with the lower leg. Make sure that your right knee does not go ahead of your ankle. Let the other leg stretch properly. Make a gentle effort to push your pelvis down. Hold the yoga posture with the determination of a warrior for 10 -20 seconds and repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Strengthens and tones the arms, legs and lower back.
- Improves body balance and increases stamina.
- Extremely beneficial in case of frozen shoulders.
- Releases stress in the shoulders very effectively in a short span of time.
- Brings auspiciousness, courage, grace and peace.
- Improves focus, balance and stability.
- Encourages good circulation and respiration.
- Stretches your arms, legs, shoulders, neck, belly, groins and ankles.
- Energizes the entire body.

Caution:

- Do not attempt this asana if you have knee or hip injury or if you have high blood pressure.

VRIKSHASANA

The name is derived from comes from the Sanskrit words; 'vriksha' meaning tree and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight with feet placed together. Focus the gaze on a fixed point in front of the body. Bend the right leg at the knee, clasp the ankle and place the sole of the foot, with the toes pointing downward, on the inside of the left thigh close to the groin pressing into the thigh to help hold the position. Balance the body weight on the standing left leg and keep the core activated. Lengthen the spine, draw the shoulder blades towards each other to open the chest and keep the shoulders away from the ears and bring your hands in prayer position (anjali mudra) in front of your chest or above the head as in image. Hold the position for as long as you can. Release the hands and then the foot, slowly. Come back to the starting position and practice on the other side. Do 2-3 sets.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the leg muscles and the hips.
- It tones and strengthens the ankles, the feet and the knees.
- It strengthens the bones of the hips and legs due to the weight-bearing nature of the pose
- It helps to build self-confidence and esteem and helps build concentration and focus.
- It gives tranquillity and provides relief from anxiety and depression.
- It helps to cure rheumatic pain and also treats numbness.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from high or low blood pressure, migraine, insomnia and knee, ankle or hip injuries.





VYAGHRASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words ‘vyagra’ meaning tiger and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Go on your fours into table top position with the palms aligned with the shoulders and the knees aligned with the hips. Inhale, arch the back and push the belly downward, lifting the head and opening the chest. Lift the right leg off of the floor and bring it towards the back of the head. Remain in the pose for a few seconds. Exhale, dropping the chin downward, arch the back downwards tucking the pelvic bone under and bring the knee of the right leg towards the nose. Hold the pose for a few seconds before returning the right leg to the starting position. Repeat the same series with the other leg. Do at least 5-7 sets.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the muscles of the back and hips.
- It stretches and tones the abdominal muscles and helps reduce abdominal and waist fat.
- Used after the child delivery for toning up the vaginal passage.
- It revitalises the reproductive system and is very useful for ladies post their delivery.
- It massages the internal organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- It strengthens the neck, shoulders and back.
- It reduces excess weight in the hips and thighs.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons suffering from chronic neck and spine conditions, wrist injury, slipped discs or sciatica.

NATARAJASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'nata' meaning dancer and 'raja' meaning king and 'asana' meaning posture. Nataraja is one of the names given to the Hindu God Shiva in his form as the cosmic dancer.

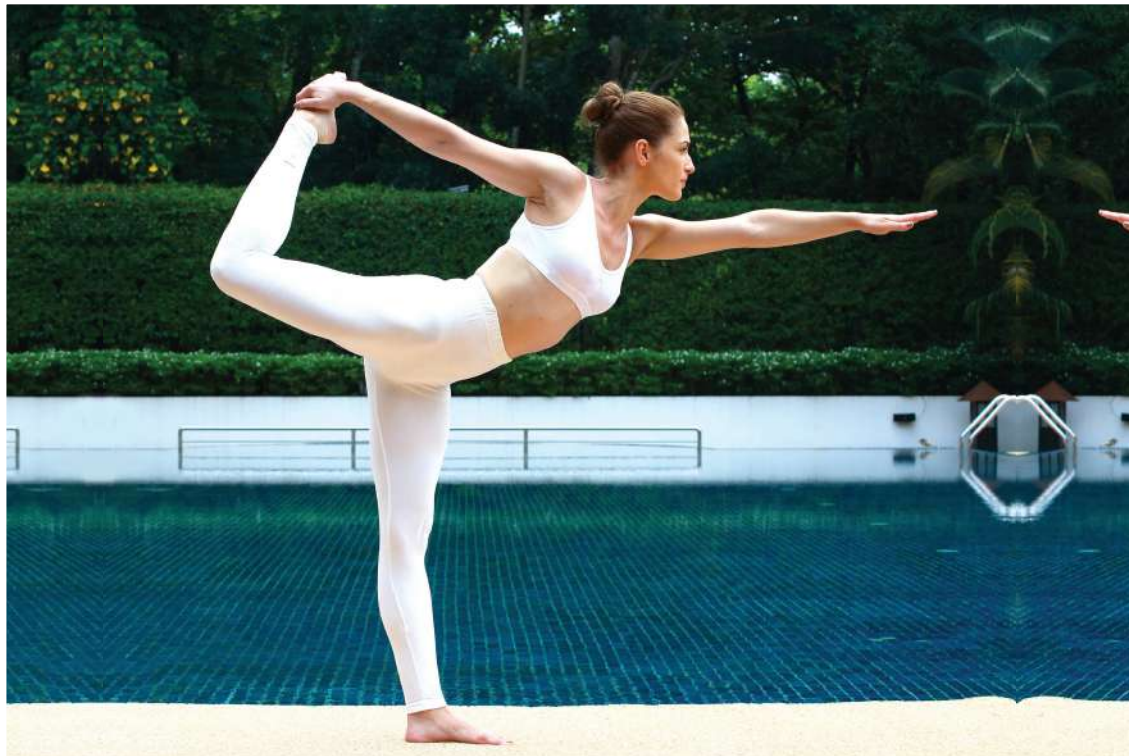
Instructions: Stand straight on your yoga mat and with your arms by your sides and feet shoulder width apart. While inhaling lift your right leg backward and upward as much as you can without pushing too hard. Hold your right ankle or your toes with the right hand. Extend your left arm straight out in front. Keep your torso upright. Hold this posture for 20 – 30 seconds and keep breathing normally. Now slowly come back to starting position. You can clasp the raised toe with both the hands in case you are very flexible. Repeat this with the other leg. Do three to four sets.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the chest, ankles, hips and legs.
- It boosts the metabolism and helps in weight loss.
- It gives the groin, abdominal organs and thighs a good stretch.
- It improves concentration and calms the mind.
- It improves digestion.
- It opens and stretches the hip flexors.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have low blood pressure, spinal or hip injury.





PARIGHASANA

The name Parighasana is derived from two Sanskrit words, 'parigha' meaning gate, and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Kneel on the mat with your toes curled under. Stretch your right leg out on the right side. Pressing the foot firmly into the floor. Rotate the hip outwards so that the kneecap of the outstretched leg faces the sky. Keep your left knee directly below your left hip. As you inhale, bring your arms out to your sides, parallel to the floor with palms facing downwards. Bend to the right over the plane of the right leg and lay your right hand down on the shin, ankle or the floor outside the right leg. Contract the right side of the torso and stretch the left. With an inhalation, sweep the left arm upward towards the ceiling beyond the left ear. Ensure that the extended leg remains in the same line as the kneeling knee. Exhale and slide the stretched out leg back. Relax and repeat the asana on the other side.

Benefits:

- It gives the hamstrings, calves, and adductor muscles a good stretch.
- It helps stretch the intercostal muscles between your ribs. These muscles assist in breathing.
- It opens the chest and the shoulders and stimulates the lungs.
- It calms the nerves and also cleans the circulatory system.
- It also provides nourishment to the abdominal organs improving digestion.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have a knee injury or neck and spinal ailments.

UTKATASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'utkata' meaning wild/frightening/intense and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand erect with your feet slightly apart. Inhale and raise your arms straight up towards the ceiling. Keep the arms parallel, palms facing inward. Exhale and bend your knees to get the thighs into a chair like position by bringing the thighs parallel to the ground. The knees should be pressed close to each other and should project slightly ahead of the toes. Lean your torso forward over your hips such that the torso forms a 90 degree angle with the upper region of the thighs. Contract the ribs and keep the core engaged when you bend forward. Keep your thighs parallel to each other and push down on your pelvis towards your heels. Keep the spine straight and elongated and press the shoulder blades to open the chest. Stay in this position for 30-60 seconds breathing calmly. Inhale and straighten your knees and lift the body as the arms comes down. The movements in this asana should be smooth and not jerky.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the legs, the thighs and the hips and gives you shapely legs.
- It tones and strengthens the spine and reduces back fat.
- It reduces abdominal fat and strengthens the core.
- It increases lung capacity and invigorates and energizes the entire body.
- It strengthens and tones the knees and the hip joints.

Caution:

- This pose should be avoided by persons suffering from knee, hip or ankle injury or pain in the lower back.
- It should be avoided by persons suffering from arthritis, headaches or insomnia.
- It should be avoided by menstruating and pregnant women.





UTTHITA HASTA PADANGUSTHASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words ‘utthita’ meaning stretched, ‘hasta’ meaning hand, ‘padangushtha’ meaning big toe and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight with your feet slightly apart. Raise your left leg and bring your left knee toward your belly. Reach out to clasp outer side of the left foot from the inner side of the thigh. Inhale and extend the left leg forward. Straighten the knee as much as possible. Find balance and swing the extended leg to the side holding the toe with the extended left arm or keep it straight ahead as in image. Breathe steadily and keep balance. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds keeping the core engaged. Then swing the leg back to the centre before bringing it down and releasing the pose. Repeat on the other side. Do 2-3 sets.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the legs, hips and ankles.
- It strengthens the core and removes fat around the waist.
- It stretches the hamstrings.
- It improves body balance and improves concentration.
- It calms the mind and helps in improving focus.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from lower back, knee or ankle injury.

CHATURANGADANDASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'chatur' meaning four, 'anga' meaning limb, 'danda' meaning staff (referring to the spine) and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Begin in plank pose keeping your elbows directly over your wrists and in line with the shoulders. Slowly lower your body to hover a few inches above the floor. Keep your back flat and straight. Lift through your chest, keeping your shoulders in line with your elbows. Do not let your chest drop or sag toward the floor. Simultaneously push back through the heels to engage the quadriceps and bring the lower body to life and reach your sternum forward, creating a straight taut line of energy from the crown of your head through your feet. Fully engage your abdominal and leg muscles. Keep your body as straight as a plank of wood, neither letting your center sag nor sticking your buttocks up in the air. Do not let the elbows spread outside. Keep them pushed against the ribcage, pointed toward your heels. Your upper and lower arms should be perpendicular, bent 90 degrees at the elbows. Do not let your shoulders drop lower than the height of your elbows. Hold for 10-30 seconds, and then lower your body all the way to the mat and rest.

Benefits:

- It tones and strengthens the arms, wrists, lower back and the abdominal muscles.
- It tones and strengthens the muscles in your back, shoulders and arms.
- It stretches and tones the core muscles.

Caution:

- Should be avoided if you have carpal tunnel syndrome or a shoulder, elbow or wrist injury.
- Pregnant and menstruating women should do the half plank only.





BALASANA

This asana gets its name from the Sanskrit words ‘bala’ that means child and ‘asana’ which means posture. This asana resembles the foetal position.

Instructions: Kneel down on the floor and ensure that your big toes touch each other as you sit on your heels. Once you are comfortable, spread your knees hip-width apart. Inhale deeply and while exhaling bend your torso forward laying it comfortably between your thighs as you exhale. Stretch the tailbone away from the back of the pelvis as you lift the base of your head slightly away from the back of the neck. Stretch your arms forward and place them in front of you, such that they are in line with your knees. You can extend your arms in front with palms facing up to intensify the stretch or extend your arms behind next to your hips (as in the image). Sink the front of your shoulder to the floor. You must feel the weight of the front shoulders pulling the blades widely across your back. Hold this position for as long as you want focusing on your breathing pattern.

Benefits:

- It calms the mind and helps in reducing stress and anxiety.
- It helps release tension in the chest, back and shoulders.
- It helps to massage and flex the internal organs in the body.
- This asana helps to stretch and lengthen the spine and stimulates digestion and elimination.
- It promotes blood circulation throughout the body.
- It stretches and tones the tendons, muscles and ligaments in the knee area.
- It increases blood circulation to the head and provides relief from headaches and migraines.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you are suffering from diarrhoea, knee injuries or high blood pressure.



YOGA FOR DETOXIFICATION

The Anamaya kosha or the physical sheath can never be healthy if it is full of toxins. Thus, Detox becomes a dire necessity given that we live in an extremely stressful environment. As the evidence of pollution and toxins in our external environment and diet mount, it becomes even more important for us to detox and strengthen our body's natural defenses to exposures beyond our control. The right yoga routine can help us detox our body and mind as a routine and help us lead a healthier and a more fulfilling life. The poses listed in this section help remove toxins, stimulate digestion and the thyroid gland, enhance the immune system, build muscle, increase metabolism and the energy levels, restore balance to our body's systems and improve mental and emotional clarity. Most of these moves literally wring the body like a sponge, helping it in getting rid of toxins and matter which is no longer useful.



VAJRASANA

Vajrasana is a sitting asana derived from the Sanskrit words ‘vajra’ meaning seated and ‘asana’ meaning pose.

Instructions: Kneel down bending your knees and stretching your lower legs backward. Make sure that the bent legs are kept as close together as possible and the big toes touch each other. Gently lower your body and rest your buttocks on your heels and your thighs on your calf muscles. Place your hands on your knees and look straight ahead breathing calmly. The head and the spine should be kept straight and erect. Sit in this pose for as long as you want. Keep the focus on the breathing pattern while in the pose. You could keep the eyes shut to improve focus and to keep the mind calm.

Benefits:

- It improves digestion, reduces acidity and bloating and helps cure constipation.
- It strengthens the back and provides relief to patients suffering from lower back problems and sciatica.
- It strengthens and tones the pelvic muscles.
- It helps pregnant women in easing out their labor pains and also reduces menstrual cramps.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from knee or lower back injuries.
- Pregnant women should keep their knees slightly apart when they practice this asana so that they do not exert undue pressure on their abdomen.

MANDUKASANA

The name Mandukasana is derived from the Sanskrit word 'manduk' meaning frog and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit comfortably in Vajrasana and tightly close the fists of your hands. While clenching the fists, tuck your thumb inside the fingers. Exhale and bend forward from the hip area pressing the clenched fists on the navel. Hold the pose and also hold the breath for as long as you can. Do not inhale or breathe and keep looking straight as you hold the bent pose. Inhale and come back to starting position (Vajrasana). Repeat three to four times.

Benefits:

- It improves the functioning of the digestive system and the excretory system and helps in the removal of toxins.
- It regulates and increases insulin secretion and hence is very good for diabetics.
- It reduces extra fat from the waist, thighs and hips.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from abdominal injuries and any kind of back pain or knee injuries.





ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘adhas’ meaning ‘down’, ‘mukha’ meaning face, ‘svana’ meaning dog and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Go on your fours into a table top position. Exhale and gently lift your hips straightening your elbows and knees and pushing the chest towards the thighs and drawing the abdomen into the rib cage till such time the body forms an inverted ‘V’. Make sure your hands stay in line with your shoulders and your feet in line with your hips. The toes should point inwards. Press your hands firmly into the ground. The neck should be kept long between the stretched arms. Your ears should touch your inner side of the arms and the gaze should be fixed on the navel. Hold the pose for 30-40 seconds. Make sure that the spine remains straight and does not curve while doing or holding the pose. Breathe calmly while holding the pose. Gently go back to the table top and repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It improves circulation throughout the body.
- It strengthens and tones the abdominal muscles and improves digestion and elimination.
- It massages the internal organs.
- It provides relief from anxiety and stress.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you suffer from high blood pressure, eye ailments, carpal tunnel syndrome, shoulder and wrist injuries.

ARDHA BHEKASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bheka' meaning frog, 'asana' meaning posture and 'ardha' meaning half.

Instructions: Lie on your belly. Press your forearms against the floor and lift your head and upper torso. Bend your right knee and bring the heel toward the buttock of the same side. Clasp this foot with your right hand while supporting the raised body on your left forearm. The base of your right palm should be pressing the top of the right foot firmly into the right buttock. Turn the right elbow towards the ceiling. Be sure to keep your knee in line with your hip. Don't push your foot too hard if it hurts your knee. Keep your shoulders open and square and ensure that you do not bend towards the left arm or shoulder. Hold the posture for 30-60 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Do three to four sets.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the back and the spine.
- It relieves pain in the heels due to calcaneal spurs and in knees due to gout.
- It stimulates the organs of the abdomen and improves digestion.
- It stretches and rejuvenates the thorax, groin and the knee joints.
- It strengthens joints and muscles throughout the body.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by persons suffering from spinal or knee injuries.





ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

The asana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath. The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘ardha’ meaning half, ‘matsya’ meaning fish, ‘indra’ meaning king and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the feet together and the spine erect. Bend the left leg and place the heel of the left foot beside the right knee. Place the right hand on the raised left knee and the left hand behind you. You may keep the other leg straight or bend and tucked below the left buttock. Twist the waist, shoulders and neck in this sequence to the left and look over the shoulder. Keep the spine erect. Hold this asana for as long as you can (approx. 30-60 seconds and breathe in and out gently throughout). Breathing out, gently ease out of the asana. Repeat on the other side. Do at least 4 sets.

Benefits:

- It increases the elasticity of the spine, tones the spinal nerves and improves spinal strength.
- It massages the abdominal and other internal organs and improves digestion and elimination of wastes.
- It relaxes the hip joints relieving stiffness.
- It stimulates the Manipura chakra.
- It opens the chest and increases the oxygen supply to the lungs.
- It relieves symptoms of backache, fatigue, menstrual discomfort and sciatica.
- It stimulates the liver, heart, lungs, kidneys and spleen.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by women during pregnancy and menstruation.
- It should be avoided by people who have had heart, abdominal, spinal or vertebral surgeries and by people suffering from peptic ulcers or hernia.

BHUJANGASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'bhujanga' meaning snake and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach with the hands placed on the sides and with your feet and heels lightly touching each other. Place your hands, palm downwards under the shoulders with the elbows firmly tucked close to/into the torso while keeping the navel on the floor. Now, placing your body's weight on your palms, inhale and raise your head and trunk. Note that your arms should be bent at your elbows when the body is raised. The neck should be arched upwards and backwards, the shoulder blades should be firm and held away from the ears. Make sure you put equal pressure on both your palms. This position can be held for 15-20 counts and then lowered while exhaling to the original position. One can do an advanced raise by straightening the arm and arching the back as much as possible. Breathing out, gently bring your abdomen, chest and head back to the floor.

Benefits:

- It tones the abdomen and strengthens the spine, back and shoulders.
- It improves flexibility of the upper and middle back.
- It expands the chest and lungs and gives the shoulders and abdomen a good stretch.
- It improves blood circulation and stimulates the digestive, reproductive and urinary systems.
- It reduces fatigue and stress.
- It provides relief from sciatica and asthma.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this asana if you are pregnant, have fractured ribs or wrists or have undergone any abdominal surgeries in the recent past.
- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from Carpel Tunnel Syndrome or have spinal disorders.





BADDHA KONASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'baddha' meaning bound, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and stretch your legs out. Elevate your hips slightly by placing a soft blanket under your hip bones in case you feel any discomfort sitting directly on the floor. Exhale and bend your knees pulling your heels towards your pelvis. Press the soles of your feet close together, and let your knees drop to the sides. Push the outer edges of your feet firmly into the floor and wrap your hands around your feet or ankles. With the pelvis in a neutral position, gently work the outer knees towards the floor. Never force your knees down. Always ensure that the spine is erect, neck long and the shoulder blades be drawn away from the ears. This pose can be held anywhere from 1-10 minutes. To exit the pose, draw your knees towards one another, extend your legs and return to the sitting pose. Your knees should never ever be forced towards the ground.

Benefits :

- It stimulates and tones the abdominal organs, ovaries, prostate gland, bladder and kidneys.
- It stretches the inner thighs, groins and knees.
- It helps relieve mild depression, anxiety and fatigue.
- It eases menstrual discomfort and sciatica.
- It provides relief from the symptoms of menopause.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from knee injury.

DHANURASANA

Dhanurasana is derived from the Sanskrit word 'dhanur' meaning a bow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your stomach, keeping your feet hip-width apart and your arms beside your body. Now, gently fold your knees and hold your ankles. While inhaling raise the thighs, head and chest as high as possible balancing the weight of the body on the lower abdomen. Join the ankles. Look upward and breathe normally and hold the pose for 15-20 seconds. Exhale and release the pose.

Benefits:

- It strengthens your shoulders, arms, neck, abdomen, back, thighs & hamstring muscles.
- It energizes the body
- It helps improve stomach disorders.
- It helps in reducing abdominal fat.
- It regulates the pancreas and is recommended for people with diabetes.
- It expands the thoracic region of the chest.
- It alleviates a hunchback.
- It increases the appetite.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by persons suffering from high blood pressure, back pain, headache or migraine.
- It is strictly prohibited for people who have undergone abdominal surgery.
- Should be avoided by women during pregnancy and menstruation.





MALASANA

The Sanskrit word ‘malasana’ comes from two words, ‘mala’ meaning garland and ‘asana’ meaning pose.

Instructions: Stand with your feet apart (2 feet) and turn your toes out slightly. Keep your gaze forward and your spine straight as you push your hips back and lower down as if into a chair, pressing the feet into the floor with your body weight evenly balanced on both feet. The goal is to bring the hips as low as you can without rounding the spine. If you can't lower down without your heels lifting off the mat, roll up a towel or blanket and place it beneath the heels. Bring your hands to prayer position in the mid-chest area. You may push into the inner knees with your elbows, further opening your hips. Hold the pose for a few breaths and raise the body to original standing pose while inhaling.

Benefits:

- It helps open and strengthen the hips, inner thighs and lengthens the spine.
- It keeps the pelvic and hip joints healthy.
- It tones the abdominal muscles and improves the function of the colon to help with elimination.
- It increases circulation and blood flow in the pelvis, which can help regulate sexual energy.
- It improves balance, concentration and focus.
- It is particularly beneficial for pregnant women as it aids in childbirth.

Caution:

- Avoid the pose if you have knee injuries.
- Don't stay in the pose if you have pain in the groins.

MARJARIASANA & BITILASANA

Marjariasana - Bitilasana is a combination of two asanas that comprise one of the most basic yoga movements often used as a warm up routine. The name 'Marjariasana' comes from the Sanskrit word 'marjari' meaning cat and the word 'Bitilasana' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bitila', meaning cow and 'asana' refers to posture.

Instructions: Get on your hands and knees in table top position. Ensure your shoulders are directly above your wrists and your hips are over your knees. Inhale and push your tail bone up towards the ceiling, letting the spine arch inwards by keeping the belly dropped towards the floor. Keep your shoulders engaged and away from your ears and lift your chin and chest and gaze up towards the ceiling. This is the Cow Pose. In Cow, let the movement start from the tailbone. Allow your neck and head to be the very last part of the movement.

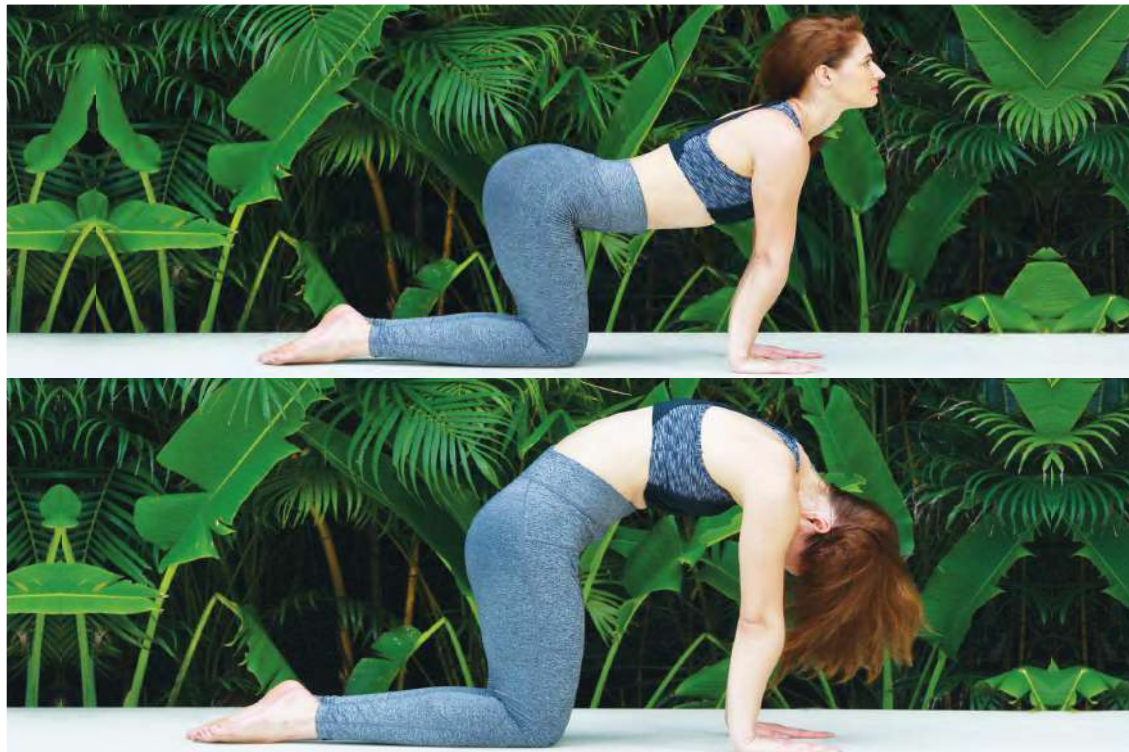
As you exhale, draw your belly to your spine and release the crown of your head toward the floor, gently releasing the back of your neck and pushing the chin to your chest. While doing this, tilt your pelvis under and around your spine and curve your back round upwards by drawing the navel firmly in towards the spine, keep your shoulders engaged and press into the mat with your hands, shins and the tops of your feet. The pose should look like a cat stretching its back. Keep the gaze downward and the head bent between the arms. This is Cat Pose. Alternate these poses. Keep your shoulder blades broad and draw your shoulders away from your ears to protect your neck during the movements. Inhale and go to Cow Pose and then exhale and return to Cat Pose. Repeat 5-20 times and then rest by sitting back on your heels with your torso upright.

Benefits:

- This combination improves posture and balance.
- It provides relief from back pain and sciatica symptoms.
- It strengthens and stretches the spine and neck.
- It stretches the hips, abdomen and the upper and lower back.
- It stimulates the kidneys and adrenal glands.
- It strengthens the wrists and shoulders.
- It massages the digestive organs and improves digestion.
- It relaxes the mind.
- It improves blood circulation.

Caution:

- It should be avoided in case of a neck or a spinal injury.





JANU SIRSASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'janu' meaning knee, 'shirsha' meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the feet together and the spine erect. Bend your right knee and press the sole of the right foot against the inner part of your left thigh close to the groin. Gently swing the right knee away from the left foot so that the thighs form an angle greater than 90 degrees and press it gently against the floor. Make sure that the chest and navel are in a straight line with the outstretched left leg. This will set your torso in the right position. Let your hands provide support as they rest beside the hips. Inhale deeply by pushing the belly and chest torso upwards. Then exhale and bend forward from the base of the hip keeping the torso straight. (avoid bending forward from the waist or rounding it). Reach for your ankles or toes, if you can, with your hands or stretch till you are comfortable. Hold the pose and breathe deep and slow. As you breathe, feel the breath filling the groin, the back of your left leg, and the entire area of your back. Inhale and release the pose. Repeat the asana with the right leg stretched out. Do three to four sets.

Benefits:

- It revitalizes the body and aids digestion.
- It strengthens the shoulders, spine, groins and the hamstrings.
- It stimulates the liver and kidneys.
- It relieves stress, anxiety, fatigue, headache and mild depression.
- It is very good for treating high blood pressure, insomnia and sinusitis.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and therefore, menstrual and menopausal disorders are reduced.
- During pregnancy, this asana helps to strengthen the back muscles. However, this asana should be practiced only up to the second trimester.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have diarrhoea, asthma or lumbar disc herniation or a serious lower back injury.

PARIVRTTA UTKATASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'parivrtta' meaning to turn around or revolve, 'utkata' meaning intense and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight with your feet together, with your thighs and big toes touching. Inhale and raise your arms above your head. Exhale and bend your knees and bring your thighs as parallel to the ground as possible ensuring that your knees just stay slightly ahead of our toes. The torso should remain straight. This is the chair pose. Lower your arms and bring your palms together in a prayer position close to your chest. Exhaling, twist your torso to the right. Bring your left elbow to the outside of your right thigh. Move your left hip back slightly and align the knees to maintain balance. Press your upper left arm against your thigh and push your right shoulder blade upwards into your back to help the chest turn towards the right. Keep the shoulders away from the ears while twisting. Turn your gaze upwards when the twist is completed. Keep your weight on your feet and keep them pressed together firmly to maintain balance. Stay in the pose for a minute breathing calmly. Inhale and return to the center and gradually ease out of the pose and repeat on the other side. Do at least 3 sets.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and help to improve digestion and elimination.
- It improves the metabolism.
- It strengthens and increases the flexibility of the shoulders, spine and neck.
- It strengthens and tones the leg and calf muscles.
- It stimulates the internal organs and the heart.

Caution:

- This pose should not be practiced by those suffering from low blood pressure, headaches, hip, ankle or spinal injuries.
- This asana should not be practiced by persons with sleeping disorders and pregnant women.





PARIVRTTA JANU SIRSASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘parivrtta’ meaning twisted, ‘janu’ meaning knee, ‘sirsa’ meaning head and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Begin by sitting on the floor with your legs wide open in front of you. Bend the left leg and tuck the foot in the angle of the groin. Keep the right leg outstretched and make sure that the knee faces the ceiling and is softly bent. As you exhale, bend sideways towards the right in such a manner that the back part of the right shoulder presses towards the inner part of the right knee. The elbow should be settled on the floor gently close to the inner side of the right knee and the hand should clasp the middle part of the sole of the right foot. Hold the right foot with both hands, the right hand from along the inside of the right knee and the left hand reaching out for the toes of the right foot from above the head. Keep the left folded leg anchored to the floor throughout. Now while holding the right foot, slowly extend and straighten the knee. As you straighten your right knee, shift your torso to face the ceiling. As you do this, lift the left hand and let it move above your head pressing it against the left ear. Keep your elbows firmly apart and stretch your torso as you do it. Hold this pose for a few seconds. Release your arms first and then gently ease out of the pose as you inhale. Repeat the same with the other leg and other side. Beginners can keep the outstretched knee slightly bent.

Benefits:

- It stretches the abdominal organs, especially the colon, liver, spleen, and pancreas and aids in digestion and elimination.
- It stretches the shoulders, spine and hamstrings and strengthens the shoulders.
- It stimulates the kidneys, the liver and other important abdominal organs.
- It provides relief from mild backache.
- It relaxes the body and helps in reducing anxiety.
- It helps in the treatment of insomnia.
- It cures headache and reduces stress levels.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by people with spinal and knee injuries.

PASASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'pasa' meaning a noose or snare and 'asana' meaning a posture. In this asana, the human body creates a 'noose' when the practitioner wraps his/her arms around a squatting posture.

Instructions: You must do this asana on an empty stomach. Stand straight with both feet shoulder width apart. Gently get into squat position ensuring that the knees are aligned with the toes and not stretched beyond them. Get the hips as close to the heels as possible and rest your torso against your thighs. Bend your knees slightly to the left. Starting at the belly, twist to your right and extend your left arm to bring its upper part to the outside of the right knee. Support the pose by using your right hand for leverage by stretch it and sweeping it to the back. Hold your left wrist with your right hand. You could also just hook your fingers if your hands can't go all the way. The idea is to make a noose. Both the shoulders should be stretched apart and the right hand will be high and the left hand will be low. For the full pose, it's necessary to close any space between the left side of the torso and the tops of the thighs. Keep your belly soft and use the pressure of the palms to increase the twist. Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to a minute. Release the twist with an exhalation, then repeat for the same length of time to the left.

Benefits:

- It helps cure mild stress in the neck, back and shoulder.
- It tones the ankles and makes them strong.
- It gives the spine, groins and thighs a good stretch.
- The chest and the shoulders open up with this asana and it helps asthmatic patients.
- It massages the internal organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- The body posture is enhanced with regular practice of this asana.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by pregnant women and women during menstruation.





PASCHIMOTTANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘paschima’ meaning back of the body and ‘uttana’ meaning intense stretch or extended and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit up with the legs stretched out straight in front of you, keeping the spine erect. Breathing in, raise both arms above your head and stretch/elongate your spine upwards. Breathing out, bend forward from the hip joints, chin moving toward the toes and the navel towards the knees. Keep the spine erect and do not curve it. Brings the arms forward over your head as you bend down. Place your hands on your knees or clasp the toes if possible without bending the knees. Rest your head down and breathe deeply for 20-60 seconds. Try and rest the elbows on the floor close to the knees. Hold the posture for at least 30-45 seconds or more. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages the internal organs and aids digestion and elimination.
- It reduces fatty deposits in the abdomen.
- It reduces anxiety, anger and irritability and provides relief from stress.
- It stretches the spine and brings flexibility.
- Its regular practice cures impotency and enhances sexual power.
- It balances the menstrual cycles.
- It is recommended especially for women after delivery.

Caution:

- This asana should not be practiced by pregnant women or by those suffering from slip disc or sciatica problem.
- It should also be avoided by ulcer patients and people suffering from asthma.

PAWANMUKTASANA

The name 'pawanmuktasana' is derived from Sanskrit words; 'pavana' meaning wind, 'mukta' which means to release and 'asana' meaning posture.

Introduction: Lie on your back with your feet together and arms beside your body. Breathe in and as you exhale, bring your right knee towards your chest and press the thigh on your abdomen with clasped hands. Keep the other leg extended and straight. Breathe in again and as you exhale, lift your head and chest off the floor and touch your chin to your right knee. Hold the posture for 30 seconds. Breathe normally if you can't hold the breath. As you exhale, come back to the ground and relax. Repeat this pose with the left leg and then with both the legs together (as in image). When performing this posture with both legs together, you may rock up and down or roll from side to side 3-5 times and then relax.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the abdominal muscles and massages the intestines and internal organs of the digestive system releasing trapped gases and improving digestion.
- It strengthens the back and abdominal muscles.
- It improves the circulation of blood in the hip area.
- It eases the tension in the lower back.
- It stimulates the reproductive organs and massages the pelvic muscles. It also helps to cure menstrual disorders.
- It helps burn fat in the thighs, buttocks and abdominal area.
- It helps to stretch the back and neck.

Caution:

- Persons suffering from high blood pressure, heart problems, hyperacidity, hernia, slip disc, testicle disorder, menstruation, neck and back problems should avoid this asana.
- This asana must not be practiced by pregnant and menstruating women.





PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words ‘raja’ meaning king, ‘kapota’ meaning pigeon and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Set on your fours, making sure your knees are placed right under your hips and your hands a little ahead of your shoulders. Now, gently slide your left knee forward. While you do this, place the left shin under your torso, and bring your left foot in front of your right knee. The outsides of your left shin must rest on the floor. Slide your right leg to the back gently. Lower the outsides of your left buttocks on the floor. Place your left heels in front of your right hip. You can angle your left knee towards the left, such that it is slightly outside the line of the hip. Your right leg should extend itself straight out of the hip to avoid putting undue pressure on the spine and lower back. Rotate it inwards, such that its midline is pressed against the floor. Take a deep breath, and as you exhale, bend your right leg at the knees with the right foot pointing towards the sky. Gently push your torso back and stretch as much as you can. Clasp the toes of your raised foot with both hands by raising the arms above the head and folding them at the elbows or as in image. Push the chest and the rib cage upwards while bending backwards. Stay in this position for at least a minute or for as long as you can. Gently bring the hands down and bring the right foot down and ease out of the pose. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- It stretches and tones most parts of the abdomen and the lower body.
- It massages the abdominal organs and improves digestion.
- It strengthens and tones the spine.
- It opens up the hip area and the chest.
- It provides relief from stress and anxiety.
- It stimulates and strengthens the urinary and reproductive systems.

Caution:

- This asana should be practiced under supervision and should be avoided by beginners.
- Avoid this asana if you have a leg, hip, Groin spinal injury.
- Should be avoided by pregnant and menstruating women.

PURVOTTANASANA

Purvottanasana in Sanskrit means an intense stretch eastwards. East also means the front of the body and it is usually the direction of budding potential and new beginnings.

Instructions: Begin by sitting on the floor with your legs extended in front of you and your arms resting at your sides. Place your hands behind your hips with the tips of your fingers right behind your buttocks. Either point your fingers towards your body, which is more common or away from your body. If you point them towards your body, your shoulders will be less open, but it's a great stretch for your wrist flexors. If you have limited range of motion of the wrist, this posture may hurt and is not recommended. If you point your fingers away from your body, your shoulders will be more open and will allow a greater stretch in your chest. Choose the option that is comfortable for you. Exhale and lift your bottom off the floor, pressing your hips upward and straighten your legs one at a time keeping your buttocks soft. Support the lift by keeping your shoulders firmly pushing back. Do not collapse into your shoulders. Lengthen your spine and your arms. Keep your shoulders away from your ears. As you move into posture, you should keep the neck elongated as you fight gravity. Once you are comfortable in the pose, you can lower the head gently towards the floor keeping the chin facing the ceiling. Relax and breathe steadily. Hold the posture for at least 30 seconds. Ease out of the pose as you exhale.

Benefits:

- It strengthens your triceps, wrists, back and legs.
- It stretches your shoulders, chest and ankles.
- It relieves stress.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people with shoulder, wrist or knee injury.





SALAMBA SARVANGASANA

The name Salamba Sarvangasana comes from the Sanskrit words ‘salamba’ meaning supported, ‘Sarva’ meaning all and ‘anga’ meaning limb or bodypart, and ‘asana’ meaning posture. Thus ‘salamba sarvangasana’ literally translates to supported-all-limbs-pose.

Instructions: Start by lying flat on your back, keeping your legs together and your arms by your side. With one swift but easy movement, lift your legs, buttocks, and back, such that your elbows support your lower body and you stand high on your shoulders. Use your hands to support your back. As you settle down in the pose, make sure you move your elbows closer to each other. Straighten your spine and legs. Your body weight should lie on your shoulders and upper arms. Do not support your body on your neck or head. Firm up your legs and point your toes out. Hold the posture for about 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe deeply while you do so. If you feel any strain on your neck, release immediately. To release, lower your knees, and bring your hands to the floor. Then, lie flat and relax.

Benefits:

- It helps calm the brain, cures mild depression and relieves stress.
- It stimulates the prostate and the thyroid glands and the abdominal organs.
- It increases the blood flow to the internal organs and is very good for the digestive and the respiratory system. It cures digestive ailments and respiratory ailments like asthma and bronchitis.
- This asana relieves the symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from chronic fatigue and insomnia.
- It improves reproductive functions and improves fertility.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from high blood pressure and shoulder and neck injuries.

SALAMBA SIRASANA

The name of this asana is derived from the Sanskrit words 'salamba' meaning with support, 'sirsa', meaning head and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Place a soft blanket on the floor to cushion your head before you start the asana. Then, kneel down on the floor on your forearms and interlace your fingers. The forearms should be pressed firmly into the floor and the elbows spread out shoulder width apart. Place the crown of your head on the blanket in a manner that it fits against your clasped hands. Breathe in, lift your knees and tip toe towards your elbows. Lift your thighs and your sitting bones so that your body forms an inverted 'V'. Keep the torso straight and do not curve the spine. As you breathe out, lift your feet off the floor. It is important to lift both the feet together. You can keep the knees slightly bent as you push up. Slowly and without jerking, push your heels up towards the ceiling till the body is aligned in a straight line, perpendicular to the floor. Keep your tail bone tightly squeezed through the asana and balance your body on your forearms. Hold the pose for about 10 seconds initially and gradually increase it to a maximum of five minutes. Fold the legs at the knees while bringing the legs down to ease out of the pose.

Benefits:

- It stimulates and regulates the pineal and pituitary glands.
- It improves blood circulation and rejuvenates all the vital internal organs.
- It revitalizes the reproductive organs and is particularly beneficial for curing infertility and menopausal symptoms.
- It calms the mind and is very useful in stress relief.
- It rejuvenates the lungs and is useful in curing asthma and sinusitis.
- It tones the digestive system and improves its functioning.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have a heart condition or are suffering from spinal, neck or shoulder injury.
- People with blood pressure should avoid the asana.
- This is an advanced pose and should be practiced under supervision only.





MARICHYASANA: SEATED SPINAL TWIST

This asana is named after the famous sage, Marichi, believed to be the son of Brahma and leader of the Maruts, the storm warrior gods. ‘Marichi’ is a Sanskrit word which means light beam and ‘asana’ means posture.

Instructions: Sit on your mat with your legs extended in front of you. Your upper torso and lower body should be at right angles to each other. The shoulders should be relaxed, spine straight and the rib cage should be lifted up. Bend your right knee and place your right foot flat on the floor besides the left knee. Keep your left leg extended and rotated slightly inwards with the thigh pressed downwards on the floor. Extend and take a deep breath and as you exhale, twist your torso towards the right extending the right arm behind you (behind the right glute), with the palm on the floor to help maintain your balance. Your left arm should be bent with the hand pointing upwards. Place the bent left elbow in the outer crook of the bent right knee. Beginners can hold on to their outer right knee with the left hand. Do not allow the right leg to be pushed either outwards or inwards from its original position. Maintain your weight equally on both of your sitting bones. Hold the pose for at least 30 seconds. Return to the seated position and repeat the pose in the opposite direction to complete a set. Do 5 sets, gradually increasing the duration of each set.

Benefits:

- It increases the flexibility and strength of the spine and the shoulder muscles.
- It massages the internal organs and glands making them function effectively.
- It opens up the breathing passages and the lungs.
- It rejuvenates the abdominal muscles and the digestive system.
- It calms the brain and relaxes the mind.
- It helps ease menstrual pain.

Caution:

- Please do not do this asana if you suffer from a spinal injury or have a degenerative disc disease.

SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA

The term is derived from the Sanskrit words 'setu', meaning bridge, 'bandha' meaning lock, 'sarva' meaning all, 'anga' meaning limb and 'asana' meaning pose.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back with your arms placed on the sides palms facing downwards. Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor hip-width apart ensuring that the ankles and knees are placed in a straight line. Inhale and lift your back (lower, upper and middle) and the chest off the floor. Roll in your shoulders and make sure your chin touches your chest. Let your shoulders, feet and arms support your weight. Keep the buttocks squeezed firmly. The fingers can be interlaced and the clasped hand can be pressed firmly against the floor to help keep the torso raised. Hold the pose for 40-60 seconds. Breathe slowly and deeply as you hold the pose. Exhale and bring down the body slowly. Repeat the asana 4-5 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and stimulates the digestive system and forces elimination of toxins.
- It revitalizes the thyroid and the pituitary gland.
- It reduces depression, stress and anxiety and calms the brain.
- It provides relief from menstrual pain and symptoms of menopause.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, sinusitis, asthma, insomnia and osteoporosis.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from neck or spinal injuries and by pregnant women.





SUPTA MATSYENDRASANA

The name 'supta matsyendrasana' is named after an ancient yoga master, 'matseyendra' whose name literally means "lord of the fishes" and the Sanskrit word 'sooptah' meaning reclined.

Instructions: Lie on your back with your arms on the sides. Inhale and draw your right knee to your chest keeping your left leg extended on the floor. Extend your right arm out along the floor at shoulder height with your palm facing down and pressed against the floor as in image. Twist your hips slightly to the right and place your left hand on the outside of your right knee. Exhaling, drop your right knee over the left side of your body using the left hand to push the bent knee gently down towards the floor on the left side. Turn your head to the right and gaze towards the fingertips of the extended right hand. Keep your shoulder blades pressed against the floor and away from your ears. Hold the pose for 10-25 breaths. Inhale and bring the knee to centre and gradually release the pose and repeat on the other side. Do 3-4 sets.

Benefits:

- It massages the abdomen and improves digestion and helps to remove toxins.
- It stretches, strengthens and relaxes the spine making it more flexible.
- It helps to hydrate the spinal discs.

Caution:

- Please do not do this asana if you suffer from a spinal injury or have a degenerative disc disease.

SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA

The name Supta Baddha Konasana comes from four Sanskrit words: 'supta' meaning reclining, 'baddha' meaning bound, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on the ground with your arms by your side. Bend your knees and bring the heels of both feet close to the groin keeping the soles of both feet together. Your palms must lie next to your hips and pressed downwards. Exhale deeply by contracting the abdominal muscles and squeezing the tail bone upwards close to your pubic bone. Feel the stretch in your lower back and hold this position. Quickly inhale and as you exhale again, let your knees open up and give a good stretch to your inner thighs and the groin area. Do not arch your spine forcefully while breathing and keep your shoulders broad and away from the neck while doing the asana. Stay in the pose for up to a minute breathing deeply and slowly. Exhale and release the pose going back to the lying down position. Some might prefer to keep the palms facing upwards through the pose for greater relaxation.

Benefits:

- It calms and rejuvenates the digestive system and provides relief from irritable bowel syndrome.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and is useful in curing infertility and menstrual disorders and provides relief from symptoms of menopause.
- It activates the prostate gland, kidneys and bladder.
- It stretches the inner thighs, knees and the groin.
- It calms the mind and provides relief from mild depression and anxiety.
- It helps to open up the hips and flexes the hip flexors.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have knee, groin or hip injury and in case of lower back pain.
- Pregnant women should do this asana under supervision only and should keep their chest and head raised by placing a soft blanket.





UPAVISTHA KONASANA

The term comes from the Sanskrit words 'upavistha' meaning seated, 'kona' meaning angle and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Sit erect and keep the spine straight with the legs straight in front of you. Lean your torso back slightly on your hands and slide both the legs outwards in such a manner that they spread on the sides of the pelvis (the legs should form a 90 degree angle with the pelvis as in the image). Press your hands against the floor and slide your buttocks forward, widening the legs another 10 to 20 degrees. If you feel uncomfortable, raise the buttocks slightly by placing a folded blanket under the buttocks. Let your toes point upwards. The knee caps of the outstretched legs should point straight up toward the ceiling. Now with your buttocks pressed heavily into the floor and your knee caps pointing up at the ceiling, walk your hands forward between your legs as you exhale gently. Keep your arms long. As with all forward bends, the emphasis is on moving from the hip joints and maintaining the length of the front torso. Do not bend from the waist or curve it. Always bend forward from the hip keeping the torso straight. Stay in the pose for a minute or so breathing calmly. Inhale, raise the torso and release the pose gently. Repeat 3-4 times.

Benefits :

- It gives a very good stretch to the hips, legs, the abductor muscles of the groin and the hamstrings.
- It tones and detoxifies the internal organs and improves digestion.
- It soothes the mind and helps reduce stress and anxiety.
- It provides relief from sciatica and arthritis.
- It detoxifies the kidneys.
- It activates the core muscles.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by people suffering from lower spine, groin, hip or hamstring injuries.
- This asana should be avoided by pregnant or menstruating women.

URDHVA DHANURASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words 'urdhva' or upward facing and 'dhanur' meaning bow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie flat on your back on the floor with your arms placed beside you, palms facing downwards and legs hip width apart. Bend your knees and bring the soles of both feet as close to the buttocks as possible. Make sure that your feet are hip-width apart. Bring your hands behind each corresponding shoulder, palm facing downwards, fingers open and pointing towards the shoulder. Inhale and lift your body off the floor by pressing the soles of the feet and the palms firmly into the floor. The body will form a bow shape as you lift it towards the ceiling. Lift it as much as you can ensuring that your legs and knees stay in line with the hips and do not splay outwards to avoid putting pressure on the back. Let your head hang gently. Your neck should be long. Breathe calmly as you hold the pose for 30-60 seconds. Exhale and gently lower the body and go to starting position. Lie down calmly in shavasana between the postures. You can repeat the asana 2-3times.

Benefits:

- It stimulates the pituitary and thyroid glands.
- It helps to expand the chest and stimulates and expands the lungs and increases oxygen supply and hence is very good for asthmatic patients.
- It massages the internal organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- It stretches and tones the legs, abdomen, buttocks, spine, shoulder blades, glutes, hamstrings, wrists and arms.
- It is known to help in stress relief and treats depression.
- It stimulates the reproductive system and helps in curing infertility.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you are suffering from spinal or wrist injury or carpal tunnel syndrome.
- People with high blood pressure and headache and migraine problem should not perform this asana.





URDHVA PRASARITA PADASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words; ‘urdhva’ meaning upwards, ‘prasarita’ meaning extended, ‘pada’ meaning foot and ‘asana’ meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie straight on the floor on your back with your arms along your sides or extend them outwards. Keep the legs extended and feet together. Exhale and contract your core abdominal muscles, draw the navel into the spine and press the sides of the waist into the floor and raise your legs together vertically upward without bending, making a right angle with the floor. Squeeze your tail bone down as your legs go up. Beginners can bend their knees and bring the heels close to the hips before unfolding and raising them straight up. Hold the position for 20-40 seconds and then lower the legs without bending a third way down (without jerking and without touching the floor) and again take them back to the 90 degree position. Inhale as you come down and exhale as you go up. You can repeat this action 5-10 times. Do not raise the back and the lower hip from the floor as you do this asana.

Benefits:

- It strengthens the core abdominal muscles and reduces abdominal fat.
- It improves lumbar spine strength.
- It improves flexibility of the hip flexors.
- It improves digestion and elimination.
- It strengthens the Manipura chakra that improves self-discipline and will power.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons with lower back injuries and sciatica.
- Pregnant and menstruating women should also avoid this asana.

UTTANASANA

The name is derived from Sanskrit words, 'uttana' meaning an intense stretch and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Stand straight and rest your hands on your hips. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints keeping the knees soft. Do not bend from the waist and keep the torso straight as you bend forward. You might have to move your hips slightly as you bend forward to avoid losing balance. Keep your sitting bones/hips pointing towards the ceiling and do not let them slouch. Let your hands rest on the ground, in front of or next to your feet. The legs should be parallel to each other maximum shoulder width apart and the toes should point forward. The chest should press against the thighs, the neck should be long and the head can dangle with the chin close to the knees and your gaze fixed between your legs. Hold the pose for as long as you can, breathing calmly. Feel the fold and the stretch from your hip bone and the hamstrings. To release the pose, inhale lift the torso up from the hip bone without curving your back contracting the core and the hip muscles and pressing the tailbone down firmly without curving or rolling the spine or the neck. Repeat the asana 3-4 times.

Benefits:

- It massages and revitalizes the digestive system and improves digestion and elimination.
- It activates the liver and the kidneys.
- It stretches and strengthens the back, hips, calves and the hamstrings.
- It helps to reduce stress and provides relief from anxiety.
- It provides relief from headaches and insomnia.
- It gives relief in menopause and from menstrual problems.
- It provides relief from high blood pressure, asthma, sinusitis and osteoporosis.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and helps cure infertility.

Caution:

- Avoid this asana if you have lower back or hamstring injuries or if you suffer from sciatica or glaucoma..





GARUDASANA

The name comes from the Sanskrit words 'garuda' meaning eagle and 'asana' meaning posture. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports God Vishnu and helps humanity fight against demons.

Instructions: Stand erect. Gently bend your right knee, and wrap your left leg around your right, such that the knees are stacked over each other. Your left foot must touch your right shin. Raise your arms to the shoulder height and wrap your right hand around your left. Ensure that your elbows are bent at 90-degree angles and are also stacked. Slowly turn the hands so that the palms face each other. Balance the body well and lower the hips gently without leaning on either side. Hold the pose for a few seconds. Breathe deeply and slowly. Focus on the third eye (between the eyebrows on the forehead) and let go of your negative emotions. Release the pose, switch the limbs and repeat.

Benefits:

- It stretches and tones the hips, thighs, shoulders and upper back.
- It improves balance and strengthens the calves.
- It provides relief from sciatica and rheumatism.
- It increases the flexibility of the limbs.

Caution:

- Avoid practicing this pose if you have had a recent knee, ankle or elbow injury.

HALASANA

The name is derived from the Sanskrit words 'hala' meaning plow and 'asana' meaning posture.

Instructions: Lie straight on your back, feet together with your arms placed beside your body and your palms facing downwards. Inhale and lift your feet and hips and waist (in that order) off the ground using your abdominal muscles. Your legs should be at a 90-degree angle from the floor. Use your hands to support your hips and legs. Bend your legs from the hips so that they are parallel to the floor and take them beyond your head without bending the legs and press the toes into the mat. Gaze at the navel and Keep the neck long and the shoulders broad. The weight of the lifted part of the body should be borne by the shoulders without putting any pressure on the neck. The hands can continue to support the raised hips or can be outstretched and clasped together as in figure. Remain in the posture for 40-60 seconds while focussing on your breathing pattern. Exhale and gently bring down your legs, waist and torso without jerking.

Benefits:

- It regulates metabolism and helps in weight loss.
- It massages the digestive organs and improves digestion and elimination.
- It removes toxins from the urinary and the digestive tract.
- It regulates the working of the thyroid and the pituitary gland.
- It is known to regulate sugar levels and hence is very good for diabetics.
- It revitalizes the reproductive system and provides relief from infertility and symptoms of menopause.
- It helps reduce stress and fatigue.

Caution:

- This asana should be avoided by persons suffering from neck or spinal injury, diarrhoea or high blood pressure.
- Women should avoid the asana during their menstruation and pregnancy.



THE PRANAMAYA-KOSHA – THE ENERGY SHEATH

The Pranayama Kosha is the energy kosha or sheath. It is considered the water element because of its free flowing nature. The term 'prana' finds its first mention in the Vedas, widely acknowledged as the oldest written text on our planet today. 'Prana' is a Sanskrit word literally meaning 'life-force'. It is derived from two Sanskrit syllables – 'pra' which means constant and 'an' which means movement. Therefore, prana means life force in constant motion.

This life force is the invisible vital energy that is responsible for life itself. According to the Vedas, Prana is the universal energy that pervades and vitalizes all matter. It is this energy that galvanises sub-atomic particles and atoms, which are the building blocks of all physical matter. According to the Vedas this energy flows to every corner of the universe ostensibly implying to the constant motion of all planets and the celestial bodies. In an earthly context, this creative pure original source of energy is found in all objects both living and non-living as both are an integral part of the universe. Living beings combine consciousness with this prana to infuse 'life' in them. This level of consciousness varies in all living beings with humans beings given an evolutionary advantage on account of the 'atma' or soul. This life giving soul is eternal.

This eternal soul remains in our body as long as our body is infused with the energy of 'prana'. The moment 'prana' is extinguished, the body becomes lifeless and the soul merges with the Brahman or the universe. Thus, the importance of maintaining this all important 'prana' cannot be over emphasised.

Oxygen is the vehicle of this prana and that is why the moment we lose breath, the body becomes lifeless. It is responsible for the functioning of all the vital organs. For e.g. the prana makes the blood flow, carries nutrients from the digestive system to the rest of the body, nerve impulses to the brain and back etc.

In Yoga, Pranayama is prescribed to elevate and increase this 'prana' or life force in the body. Pranayama is a Yoga practice of regulating this Prana. Ancient Yogic science believed that species that breathe fewer times a minute live longer than those that breathe slowly and take lesser number of breaths in the same time.

They cited the example of dogs who breathe faster and take about 35-60 breaths per minute and consequently have a shorter life span as compared to elephants who take only 4-5 breaths per minute and tortoises which take one breath per minute or sometimes even lesser than that and thus, have longer life spans.

Human beings normally tend to take anything between 10- 20 breaths per minute and by regulating this breathing they can lengthen their life span.

By controlling our breath and making it slow and deliberate through deep inhalations and long and slow exhalations, we slow the breath down. This improves the flow of prana or oxygen that carries all the nutrients in the body and transmissions to the brain etc. thereby improving the function of the various organs, making us healthier. Pranayama encourages the practitioner to reduce the breathing to 5-7 breaths per minute, enabling the Yogi to live a longer and healthier life.

The main benefits of pranayama are:

- It Increases and improves the quantity and quality of prana, thereby improving our energy levels. After all Prana is energy or the life force.
- It clears all the blocked energy channels or nadis and chakras, allowing for a freer flow of energy rejuvenating and energising all the organs to perform optimally.

- It calms and strengthens the brain function.
- It brings harmony between the body, mind, and spirit making the person physically and mentally stronger.
- It regulates the endocrine system and balances hormonal imbalance.
- With increased physical and mental strength, the individual's immunity increases.

Imp: Since Pranayama has a direct effect on the energy flow of the body, it should be done under the guidance of a trained Guru. For example, randomly increasing energy flow or prana in an anxious and agitated person may do more harm than good. The Yoga gurus at Carnoustie understand this and hence make a regimen basis the individual's unique body type and mental and physical disposition.



Importance of breath – why pranayama?

The breath is the most vital process in the body. It influences the activities of each and every cell and, most importantly, it is intimately linked with the performance of the brain. Human beings breathe about 15 times per minute and 21,600 times per day. Respiration fuels the burning of oxygen and glucose, producing energy to power every muscular contraction, glandular secretion and mental process. The breath is intimately linked to all aspects of human experience. Most people breathe incorrectly, using only a small part of their lung capacity. The breathing is therefore generally shallow, depriving the body of oxygen and prana essential to the health and well-being of the body. The first five practices given here are preparatory techniques which will help correct breathing habits.

In addition, Pranayama is helpful in focusing awareness on the breathing process, which is otherwise normally ignored. Practitioners develop sensitivity to the respiratory process and retrain the muscles of the pulmonary cavity, enhancing their vital capacity and preparing them for pranayama.

Rhythmic, deep and slow respiration stimulates and calms the brain, while, irregular breathing disrupts the rhythms of the brain and leads to physical, emotional and mental blocks. This disruption, in turn leads to inner conflict, imbalanced personality, distorted lifestyle and disease. Pranayama establishes regular breathing patterns, breaking this negative cycle and reversing the process. It does so by taking control of the breath and re-establishing the natural, relaxed rhythms of the body and mind.

Although breathing is mainly an unconscious process, conscious control of it may be taken at any time to help heal the body. This conscious control also helps us form a bridge between the conscious and unconscious areas of the mind.

Through the practice of pranayama, the energy trapped in neurotic, unconscious mental patterns may be released for use in more creative and joyful activity.

Breathing and life span:

In addition to influencing the quality of life, length or quantity of life is also dictated by the rhythm of the respiration. The ancient yogis and rishis studied nature in great detail. They noticed that animals with a slow breath rate such as pythons, elephants and tortoises have long life spans, whereas those with a fast breathing rate, such as birds, dogs and rabbits live for only a few years.

From this observation they realized the importance of slow breathing for increasing the human life span.

Those who breathe in short, quick gasps are likely to have shorter life span those who breaths slowly and deeply. On the physical level, this is because the respiration is directly related to the heart. A slow breathing rate keeps the heart stronger and better nourished and contributes to longer life. Deep breathing also increases the

absorption of energy by the pranamaya kosha, enhancing dynamism, vitality and general wellbeing.

Pranayama and the spiritual aspirant:

Pranayama practices establish a healthy body by removing blockages in the pranamaya kosha, enabling an increased absorption of prana. The spiritual seeker, however, also requires tranquility of mind as an essential prelude to spiritual practice. To this end, many pranayama techniques utilize kumbhaka, breath retention, to establish control over the flow of prana, calming the mind and controlling the thought process.

Once the mind has been stilled and prana flows freely in the nadis and chakras, the doorway to the evolution of consciousness opens, leading the aspirant into higher dimensions of spiritual experience. In 'The Science of Pranayama', Swami Sivananda writes, "There is an intimate connection between the breath, nerve currents and control of the inner prana or vital forces. prana becomes visible on the physical plane as motion and action, and on the physical plane as motion and action, and on the mental plane as thought. Pranayama is the means by which a yogi tries to realize within his individual body the whole cosmic nature and attempts to attain perfection by attaining all the powers of the universe.

In "Hatha yoga pradeepika", one of the ancient texts on Hatha yoga, it is mentioned, "when the breath wanders or becomes irregular, the mind is also unsteady. But when the breath is still so is the mind." (Chapter 2, verse 2)



UNDERSTANDING PRANA – THE VITAL LIFE FORCE AND ITS DIFFERENT FORMS

The term 'prana' finds its first mention in the Vedas, widely acknowledged as the oldest written text on our planet today. 'Prana' is a Sanskrit word literally meaning 'life-force'. It is derived from two Sanskrit syllables – 'pra' which means constant and 'an' which means movement. Therefore, prana means life force in constant motion.

This life force is the invisible vital energy that is responsible for life itself. Our breath is the vehicle of this prana and that is why when the breathing stops, the body becomes lifeless. According to the Vedas, Prana is the universal energy that pervades and vitalizes all matter. It is this energy that galvanises sub-atomic particles and atoms, which are the building blocks of all physical matter. Thus, Prana is in sync with the Big Bang theory on the origin of this universe. According to the Vedas this energy flows to every corner of the universe ostensibly implying to the constant motion of all planets and the celestial bodies. In an earthly context, this creative pure original source of energy is found in all objects both living and non-living as both are an integral part of the universe.

As long as there is prana, there is life. The moment 'prana' is extinguished, the body becomes lifeless. Thus, the yogis placed a lot of importance on this prana.

“All that exists in the three worlds rests in the control of prana. As a mother protects her children, O prana, protects us and gives us splendour and wisdom.”

Since prana is the creating or building force and helps develop the embryo to include the five senses it is superior to them. We can live without sight, smell, hearing, speaking and feeling but cannot live without the force that keeps them alive and that in Yoga is the life-giving force called Prana. The yoga scriptures describe five types of prana on the basis of their attributes and functions. The understanding of this is vital to a more focussed and personalised yoga journey.

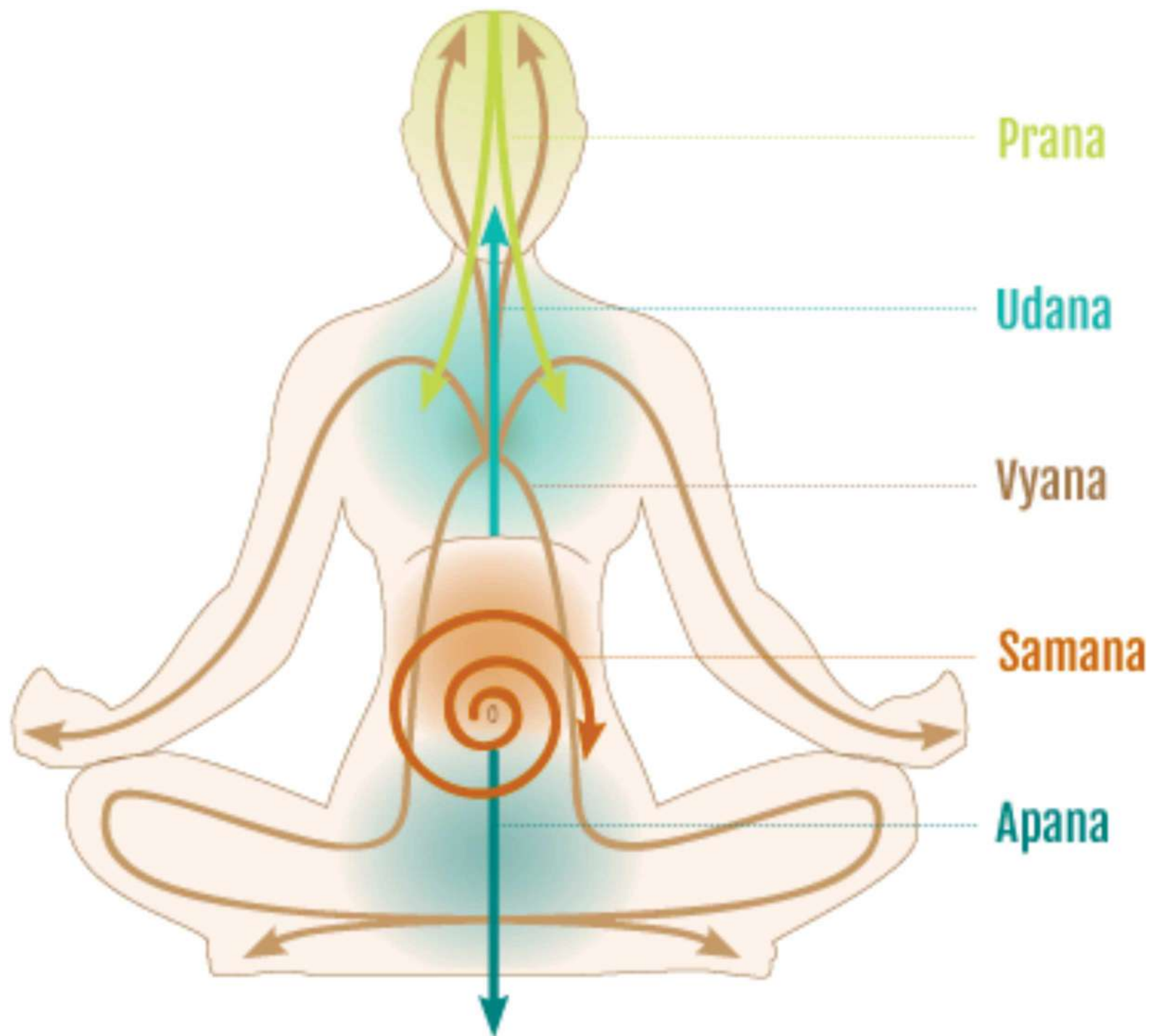
These five prana vayus control the functioning of the different parts of the human body and need to be in complete harmony with each other in the correct proportion for comprehensive physical, emotional and spiritual wellness.

These five types of pranas are as follows:

PRANA VAYU

Prana Vayu in Sanskrit means that which flows 'inwards and upwards'. Named after the vital life force itself, this is the fundamental energizing force. It is an inward moving vital energy that resides and flows in the chest, primarily in the heart and the lungs region. It governs respiration and all intake, be it air, food, impressions, ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. It controls our perception of the world in general. And when this is low, we feel exhausted and depressed and have a negative view of everything around us. When it is flourishing, we feel charged and excited and perceive the world as positive. Prana Vayu activates and functions primarily in the region of the lungs and heart. It provides energy, vitality, enthusiasm and positivity. On a more subtle level, this vayu sensitises us to the environment both in terms of reactions and inner awareness. Weak prana Vayu can cause heart, respiratory and sensory ailments and mental depression and anxiety. When this Vayu is weak, the mind cannot function and the person experiences anxiety and shortness of breath at all times.

Yoga gurus endorse pranayamas like Bhastrika, Nadi Shodhana and Ujjayi Pranayama to increase the flow of prana vayu. Chest opening yoga poses that strengthen the lungs and heart region like the like Dhanurasana- bow pose, Ustrasana - camel pose, Bhujangasana- cobra pose, Natarajasana - dancer pose, Setubandha asana-bridge



“All that exists in the three worlds rests in the control of prana.
As a mother protects her children, O prana, protects us and gives us splendour and wisdom.”

pose, Virabhadrasana-Warrior I, Utkatasana- Chair pose, and Tadasana - Mountain pose are strongly recommended.

APANA VAYU

Apana vayu in Sanskrit means the ‘air that moves away’. It flows in the downward and outward direction. It resides and functions in the lower part of the body below the navel. It is responsible for all elimination, reproduction and sexual activity. It controls digestion, reproduction, and elimination. Weak or dysfunctional Apana-Vayu leads to ailments of the digestive, reproductive and excretory system. In a yogic perspective, this energy is not only responsible for the elimination of physical waste and toxins from the body, but also for the removal of mental negative energy and thoughts.

Since this prana eliminates, it needs a strong Prana vayu or inward energy to help it push with greater force and thus they are intrinsically connected. Understanding this energy also helps the practitioner understand the importance of letting go of thoughts and emotions which are negative as bottling these inside amounts to bottling waste. A constipated body and mind are equally harmful.

Yoga gurus recommend Kapal Bhati pranayama and poses of forward bends and seated twists like Vrikshasana – tree pose, Ardh Padma Janusirsasana- bound half lotus head-to-knee pose, Ardh Padma balance pose - Half Lotus Tip Toe Pose, Marichiasana, Dancing natrajasana etc. Agni Sara Kriya, Ashvini Mudra and Mula Bandha are also very useful for this type of vital force.

SAMANA VAYU

Samana in Sanskrit means ‘equal’. Thus, this is a balancing energy force. It operates and resides in the area beneath the diaphragm and the navel. It is the fire element Samana-Vayu that controls the digestion and assimilation of all substances. Its imbalance can lead to ailments of the stomach, liver and the large intestine. In a yogic context, digestion here does not refer to food alone but to digestion and assimilation of emotions, and feelings. This force can be strengthened by firming the Manipura chakra. A weak and imbalanced Samana Vayu causes indigestion and leads to lower confidence and anxiety.

Yoga recommends Kapalabhati Pranayama with Uddiyana Bandha and Agni Sara Kriya and twisting and core-strengthening yoga poses like the Boat Pose - Paripurna Navasana, Dolphin Pose, cat pose – Marjaryasana, Chair Pose- Utkatasana. Crane pose - Bakasana. Four-Limbed Staff Pose- chaturanga Dandasana, Happy Baby Pose- Balasana etc.

VYANA VAYU

The term Vyana-Vayu in Sanskrit means “outward moving air”. Thus, this prana moves from the centre of the body to the periphery. It controls the circulatory system and hence is responsible for the transportation, distribution and communication of oxygen, nutrients and impulses etc throughout the body. It also controls the muscular system which relies on the nerve impulses for voluntary and involuntary movement. It integrates with the other pranas keeping them nourished and stable. It functions through the nadis or energy channels in the body. A weak or dysfunctional Vyana-Vayu leads to ailments of the circulatory, lymph and the nervous system and may lead to serious mental issues due to impaired nervous system that relies on transmission and can cause acute deficiencies and skin problems.

Yoga recommends practicing Anuloma – viloma pranayama with kumbhaka and yoga asanas like the Sun Salutations – surya namaskar, Virabhadrasana I, II and III - warrior I, II and III, Ardha Chandrasana -half moon pose, Garudasana -eagle pose etc

UDANA VAYU

Udana Prana is a Sanskrit term for ascending or that 'which moves upwards'. This energy flows from the heart to the brain. It controls speech and expression, emotions and thoughts. A weak or impaired Udana-Vayu can cause ailments related to speech, breathlessness, throat etc. It can result in the individual not being able to articulate and express emotions leading to extreme mental distress and agony. Ancient yoga scriptures believe that it is this energy that makes the soul leave the physical body and a strong Udana Vayu makes death peaceful and calm

Yoga recommends practice of Ujjayi Pranayama and Bhramari Pranayama with Jalandhara Bandha and Viparitarani Mudra to strengthen this vayu. Practicing inversions and back bending yoga poses such as Setu Bandha Sarvangasana - Bridge Pose, Sarvangasana -Shoulderstand, Halasana -Plow Pose, Matsyasana -Fish Pose, and Sirsasana -Headstand are strongly recommended.

The Yoga gurus at Carnoustie believe that a good understanding of these pranas is important for a practitioner to better understand how his/her Yoga regimen is fashioned and will be more physically, mentally and emotionally invested in it leading to better results.

THE FIVE PRANA



UDANA

PHYSICAL LOCATION- THROAT TO HEAD

FUNCTIONS - PHYSICAL SENSES, MENTAL STRENGTH, SPEECH
CHAKRA - VISHUDDHI



PRANA

PHYSICAL LOCATION- DIAPHRAGM TO THROAT (HEART)

FUNCTIONS - RESPIRATION, SENSORY PERCEPTION
CHAKRA - ANHATA



SAMANA

PHYSICAL LOCATION- AT THE NAVEL

FUNCTIONS - DIGESTION, METABOLISM, NOURISHING
CHAKRA - MANIPURA



VYANA

PHYSICAL LOCATION- PERVADES ENTIRE BODY (AURA)

FUNCTIONS - CIRCULATION, NERVES
CHAKRA - SWADHISTHANA



APANA

PHYSICAL LOCATION- PELVIC FLOOR TO FEET

FUNCTIONS - ELIMINATION, BIRTHING, MENSTRUATION
CHAKRA - MULADHARA

PREPARING FOR PRANAYAMA

It's important to note that pranayama are not merely breathing exercises in terms of oxygen value. Although the various kinds of pranayama involve control of breath, the term indicates a much deeper meaning. The word 'Pranayama' is comprised of two roots 'prana' and 'ayama'. Prana means vital energy or life force. Ayama means 'extension' or 'expansion'. Thus, the word 'pranayama' means 'extension' or 'expansion' of the dimension of prana.

Air or oxygen is the fuel for prana to function in the body. Therefore, pranayama utilizes breathing to influence the flow of prana in the 'nadis' or channels of energy in the energy body. Pranayama should not be considered as mere breathing exercises aimed at introducing extra oxygen into the lungs. The different types of pranayama are mechanisms whereby the life force can be activated and regulated in order to go beyond one's normal boundaries or limitations and attain a higher state of vibratory energy.

Four aspects of Pranayama:

There are four important aspects of breathing in the pranayama practices. They are:

- Pooraka or inhalation
- Rochaka or exhalation
- Antar kumbhaka or internal breath retention
- Bahir kumbhaka or external breath retention
- Different types of pranayama utilize these four aspects of breathing uniquely.

General guidelines for the practitioner:

Pls note: In the traditional texts on yoga, there are innumerable rules and regulations pertaining to pranayama. The main points are to exercise moderation, balance and common sense with regard to inner and outer thinking and living. However, for those who seriously wish to take up the advanced practices of pranayama, the guidance of a guru or an experienced teacher is essential.

BREATHING:

Always breathe through the nose and not through the mouth unless specifically instructed otherwise. The nose should be cleaned regularly by Jala neti prior to the session. Be aware of the nostrils throughout the techniques. While inhaling, the nostrils should dilate slightly or expand outwards and while exhaling, they should relax back to their normal position.

TIME OF PRACTICE:

The best time to practice pranayama is during the early morning when the body is fresh and the mind has very few impressions. If this is not possible, another good time is just after sunset. Tranquillizing pranayamas may be performed before sleep. Try to practice regularly at the same time and place each day. Regularity in practice increases strength and will power as well as acclimatizing the body and mind to the increased pranic force.

PLACE OF PRACTICE:

Practice in a quiet, clean and pleasant room which is well ventilated but not draughty. Generally, avoid practicing in direct sunlight, as the body will become over-heated, except at dawn when the soft rays of the early morning sun are beneficial. Practicing in a draught or wind, in air-conditioning or under a fan may upset the body temperature and cause chills. Like other practices of yoga privacy is essential, unless it is done in a group.

SITTING POSITION:

A comfortable, sustainable meditation posture is necessary to enable efficient breathing and body steadiness during the practice. Siddhasana (for men) or siddha yoni asana (for women) is one of the best postures suitable for pranayama. The body should be as relaxed as possible throughout the practice with the spine, head and neck straight. Sit on a folded blanket or cloth of natural fiber to ensure maximum conduction of energy during the practice.

SEQUENCE:

Pranayama should be performed after asanas and before meditation practice. After practicing pranayama one may lie down in shavasana for a few minutes.

CLOTHES:

Loose, comfortable clothing made of natural fibers should be worn during the practice. The body may be covered with a sheet or blanket when it is cold or to keep insects away.

BATHING:

Take a bath or shower before commencing the practice, or at least wash the hands, face and feet, do not take a bath for at least half an hour after the practice to allow the body temperature to normalize.

EMPTY STOMACH:

Pranayama should be practiced with empty stomach, or wait at least three to four hours after meals. Food in the stomach places pressure on the diaphragm and lungs, making full, deep respiration difficult.

DIET:

A balanced diet of protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals is suitable for most pranayama practices. A combination of grains, pulses, fresh fruit and vegetables with a little milk product if necessary, is recommended. The more advanced stages of pranayama require a change in diet and a guru should be consulted for guidance on this.

AVOID STRAIN:

With all pranayama practices it is important to remember that the instructions to not to strain, not to try to increase your capacity too fast, applies just as it does to asana practice. Breath retention (kumbhaka) should only be practiced for as long it is comfortable.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS:

When practicing for the first time, various symptoms may manifest in normally healthy people. These are caused by the process of purification and the expulsion of toxins, sensation of itching, tingling, heat or cold and feelings of lightness or heaviness may occur. Such experiences are generally temporary, but if they persist, check with your teacher.

CONTRA-INDICATIONS:

Pranayama should not be practiced during any illness, although simple techniques such as breath awareness and abdominal breathing in Shavasana may be performed. For therapeutical purpose consult an expert.

NO SMOKING:

It is not advisable for pranayama practitioners to smoke tobacco or cannabis.

NATURAL BREATHING

This is a simple technique which introduces the practitioners to their own respiratory system and breathing patterns. It is very relaxing and may be practiced at any time. Awareness of the breathing process is itself sufficient to slow down the respiratory rate and establish a more relaxed rhythm.

The process of natural breathing:

- Sit in a comfortable meditation posture or lie in Shavasana and relax the whole body.
- Observe the natural and spontaneous breathing process.
- Develop total awareness of the rhythmic flow of the breath
- Feel the breath flowing in and out of the nose.
- Do not control the breath in any way.
- Notice that the breath is cool as it enters the nostrils and warm as it flows out.
- Observe this with the attitude of a detached witness.
- Feel the breath flowing in and out at the back of the mouth above the throat.
- Bring the awareness down to the region of the throat and feel the breath flowing in the throat.
- Bring the awareness down to the chest and feel the breath flowing in the trachea and bronchial tubes.
- Next, feel the breath flowing in the lungs.
- Be aware of the lungs expanding and relaxing.
- Shift the attention to the rib cage and observe the expansion and relaxation of this area.
- Bring the awareness down to the abdomen. Feel the abdomen move upward on inhalation and downward on exhalation.
- Finally, become aware of the whole breathing process from the nostrils to the abdomen and continue observing it for some time.
- Bring the awareness back to observing the physical body as one unit and slowly open the eyes.

ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing is practiced by enhancing the action of the diaphragm and minimizing the action of the rib cage. The diaphragm is a domed sheet muscle that separates the lungs from the abdominal cavity and, when functioning correctly, promotes the most efficient type of breathing. It is the effect of the diaphragm rather than the diaphragm itself that is experienced as the stomach rises and falls. Sensitivity to the muscle itself, however, will come with practice. During inhalation the diaphragm moves downward, pushing the abdominal contents down and outward. During exhalation the diaphragm moves upward and the abdominal contents move inward.

Movement of the diaphragm signifies that the lower lobes of the lungs are being utilized. The proper use of the diaphragm causes equal expansion of the alveoli, improves lymphatic drainage from basal parts of the lungs, massages the liver, stomach, intestines and other organs that lie immediately beneath it, exerts a positive effect on the cardiac functions and coronary supply, and improves oxygenation of the blood and circulation.

Abdominal breathing is the most natural and efficient way to breathe. Due to tension, poor postures, restrictive clothing and lack of training, however, it is often forgotten. Once, this technique again becomes a part of daily life and correct breathing is restored there will be a great improvement in the state of physical and mental wellbeing.

The process of Abdominal (or diaphragmatic) breathing:

- Lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.
- Observe the spontaneous breath without controlling it in anyway. Let it be absolutely natural. Continue observing the natural breath for some time. Place the right hand on the abdomen just above the level and the left hand over the center of the chest. The right hand will move up with inspiration and down with expiration right hand will move up with inhalation and down with exhalation. The left hand should not move with the breath.
- There should be no tension in the abdomen, do not try to force the moment in anyway.
- Try not to expand the chest or remove the shoulders. Feel the abdomen expanding and contracting continue breathing slowly and deeply.
- Inhale while expanding the abdomen as much as possible, without expanding the rib cage. at the end of the inhalation the diaphragm will be compressing the abdomen and the navel will be at its highest point.
- On exhalation the diaphragm moves upwards and the abdomen moves downward.
- At the end of exhalation, the abdomen will be contracted and the navel compressed towards the spine. Continue for a few minutes.

THORACIC BREATHING

Thoracic breathing utilizes the middle lobes of the lungs by expanding and contracting the rib cage. It expands more energy than abdominal breathing for the same quantity of air exchange. It is often associated with physical exercise and exertion, as well as stress and tension, when it helps the body to obtain more oxygen. However, the tendency in many people is to continue this type of breathing long after the stressful situation has passed, creating bad breathing habits and continued tension.

The process of Thoracic breathing:

- Sit in a meditation posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.



- Maintain unbroken awareness of the natural breath for some time, concentrating on the side of the chest.
- Discontinue any further use of the diaphragm and begin to inhale by slowly expanding the rib cage.
- Feel the movement of the individual ribs outward and upward and be aware of this expansion drawing air into the lungs.
- Expand the chest as much as possible.
- Exhale by relaxing the chest muscles. Feel the ribcage contracting and forcing the air out of the lungs.
- Breathe slowly and deeply through the chest with total awareness.
- Do not use the diaphragm.
- Continue thoracic breathing for a few minutes, passing slightly after each inhalation and exhalation.

CLAVICULAR BREATHING

Clavicular Breathing is the final stage of total rib cage expansion. It occurs after the thoracic inhalation has been completed. In order to observe a little more air into the lungs, the upper ribs and the collar bone are pulled up with the muscles of the neck, throat and sternum. This requires maximum expansion on inhalation and only the upper lobes of the lungs are ventilated. In daily life, clavicular breathing is only used under conditions of extreme physical exertion and when experiencing obstructive Airway disease such as asthma.

The process of clavicular breathing:

- Lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.
- Perform thoracic breathing for few minutes.
- Inhale fully expanding the rib cage.
- When ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collar bone should also move up slightly.
- This will take some effort.
- Exhale slowly, first releasing the lower neck and upper chest, then relax the rest of the rib cage back to its starting position.
- Continue for a few more breaths, observing the effect of this breathing.

YOGIC BREATHING

Yogic breathing combines the previous three techniques. It is used to maximize inhalation and exhalation. Its purpose is to gain control of the breath, correct poor breathing habits and increase oxygen intake.

It may be practiced at any time and is especially useful in situation of high stress and anger for calming the nerves. However, while its inclusion in a daily yoga program will correct and deepen natural breathing patterns, yogic breathing itself should not be performed continuously.

The process of Yogic breathing

- Sit in a meditation posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.
- Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand fully.
- Try To breathe slowly that little or no sound of the breath can be heard.
- Feel the reaching into the bottom of the lungs. At the end of the abdominal expansion, start to expand the chest outward and upward.

- When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collar bone should also move up slightly. Some tension will be felt in the neck muscles.
- The rest of the body should be relaxed, feel the air filling the upper lobes of the lungs this completes one inhalation.
- The whole process should be one continuous movement, each phase of breathing merging into the next without any obvious transition point. There should be no jerks or unnecessary strain. The breathing should be like the swell of the sea.
- Now start to exhale.
- First, relax the lower neck and upper chest, then allow the chest to contract downward and then inward.
- Next, allow the diaphragm to push upward and toward the chest.
- Without straining, try to empty the lungs as much as possible by drawing or pulling the abdominal wall as near as possible to the spine.
- The entire movement should be harmonious and flowing.
- Hold the breath for a few seconds at the end of the exhalation.
- This completes one round of yogic breathing.
- At first perform 5 to 10 rounds and slowly increase to 10 minutes daily.

Practice note:

Yogic breathing is the one which is used in most pranayamas. The breath should be flow naturally and not to be forced. In Yogi Texts, it is mentioned that yogic breathing should be as smooth as the action of pulling a thread from butter. There should not be any contortions on the face in any kind of pranayama.





BHASTRIKA –THE YOGA BREATH OF FIRE

The word ‘bhasrika pranayama’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘bhasrika’, which basically means breathing like a roar or bellows. ‘Pranayama’ is regulated breathing. The ancient yogis called this breathing exercise as “the yoga breath of fire”.

Instructions: Take a deep breath in and breathe out forcefully through the nose. Do not strain. Move the abdomen outward during inhalation and push it in with the navel pushed into the spine when you breathe out. The movement should be slightly exaggerated and done with light force. It should not cause stress. One must imagine all the toxins and negativity being thrown out with each breath exhaled. Do not raise the shoulders. There should be no jerk to the body. Do this type of deep breathing at least 20 times.

Benefits:

- It purifies the blood and tones the internal organs.
- It rejuvenates the lungs.
- It speeds up metabolism and helps in balancing the doshas.
- It helps in calming the mind and provides relief from anxiety and depression.
- It improves the digestive system.

Caution:

- It should be stopped immediately in case of dizziness, excessive perspiration or a vomiting sensation.
- It should not be stressful or uncomfortable to practice.
- It should be avoided by persons suffering from excessive body heat, high blood pressure, hypertension, heart ailments, ulcers, acidity, epilepsy, headache, hernia and vertigo and pregnant and menstruating women.
- It should be done on an empty stomach.

KAPALBHATI PRANAYAMA – the shining forehead

Kapalbhati is derived from two Sanskrit words - 'Kapal' which means forehead and 'bhati' which means shining. Pranayama means regulated breathing practice. Kapal Bhati literally translates to 'the shining forehead'. Practitioners are known to glow with good health and also sharpen their intellect with this regular practice.

Instructions: Sit in any comfortable meditation asana, padmasana as a first choice or Siddha or Siddha yoni asana, with the head and spine straight and the hands resting on the knees in either chin mudra or jnana mudra. Close the eyes and relax the body. Inhale deeply through both nostrils, expanding the abdomen, and exhale with a force full contraction of the abdominal muscles. Do not strain. The subsequent inhalation should be passive or spontaneous recoil, involving no effort. Perform 10 respirations to begin with, count each respiration mentally. One can go on for 5-10 mins only if one is comfortable doing so. It is important that the rapid breathing used in this process should be from the abdomen and not from the chest. To give it a spiritual dimension, one can focus on the spiritual – 'chidakasha' or the void at the eyebrow center. Kapalabhati should be practiced after asanas or neti. It may be performed at any time of the day but on an empty stomach or 3 to 4 hours after food. If pain or dizziness is experienced, stop the practice and sit quietly for some time. When the sensation has passed, recommend the practice with less force.

Benefits:

- It boosts metabolism and aids in weight reduction and in reducing belly fat.
- It clears the energy channels, improves blood circulation and revitalizes the internal organs.
- It improves the digestion and absorption of food.
- It calms the mind and provides relief in chronic stress and anxiety.
- It energizes the brain and improves the nervous system.

Caution:

- Should be avoided by pregnant and menstruating women.
- Should be avoided by persons suffering from high blood pressure, spine injury, hernia, ulcers, epilepsy, hypertension, hernia or heart ailments (specifically by people who have stents and pacemakers).



ANULOM VILOM OR NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA - ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

Stage 1

Sit in any comfortable meditation posture, preferably siddhasana or Siddhayoni asana or padmasana. (Those who cannot sit in a meditation posture may sit against a wall with the legs outstretched or in a chair which has a straight back). Keep the head and spine straight. Relax the whole body and close the eyes. Practice yogic breathing for some time. Now hold the fingers of the right hand in front of the face. Press the index and Middle fingers gently on the eyebrow center. Both fingers should be relaxed. The thumb is placed above the right nostril and the ring finger above the left. These two fingers control the flow of breath in the nostrils by alternately pressing on one nostril, blocking the flow of breath and then the other. The little finger is comfortably folded. When practicing for long periods, the elbow may be supported by the left-hand although care is needed to prevent just restriction. Close the Right nostril with the thumb. Inhale and exhale through the left nostril 5 times. The rate of inhalation and exhalation should be normal. After 5 breaths release the pressure of the thumb on the right nostril and press the left nostril with the ring finger blocking the flow of air. Now inhale and exhale through the right nostril 5 times keeping the respiration rate normal. Lower the hand and breathe 5 times through both the nostrils together. This is one round. Practice 5 rounds for 3 to 5 minutes, making sure that there is no sound as the air passes through the nostrils.

Stage 2

Close the right nostril with the thumb and breathe deeply in through the left nostril to the count of 3 without straining or frowning. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, release the pressure of the thumb on the right nostril and while breathing out through the right nostril again to the count of 3. Thus, the time for inhalation and exhalation is equal. Next, inhale through the right nostril, keeping the same count in the same manner. At the end of inhalation close the right nostril, open the left nostril and exhale through the left nostril, counting as before. This is one round. Practice 10 rounds.

Ratio and timing:

After a few days, if there is no difficulty, increase the length of inhalation and exhalation by one count. Continue in the way, increasing the duration of inhalation and exhalation by one count as it becomes easy, until the count of 12:12 is reached. Do not force the breath in anyway and be careful not to speed up the counting during exhalation to compensate for shortage of breath. At the slightest sign of discomfort reduce the counts. After achieving the above ratio, it may be changed to 1:2 for example, breathe in for a count of 5 and breathe out for count of 10. Continue extending the breath by adding one count to the inhalation and two to the exhalation, up to the count of 12:24. This ratio establishes a calming Rhythm for the brain and heart, assisting the treatment of cardiovascular and nervous system disorders specifically, and stress related conditions generally.

Advanced practice:

Nadi shodhana pranayama may be practiced in conjunction with jalandhara bandha, moola bandha and uddiyana bandha. First practice jalandhara bandha by pressing the chin against the chest with internal retention only. Once this practice has been perfected, combine Jalandhara bandha with external breath retention. Then introduce moola bandha (the contracting the perineum and cervix) with jalandhara during internal retention, then external retention. When this has been mastered, apply uddhiyana bandha or external retention only. It may be necessary to adjust the ratio of the breath to suit the individual capacity. Breathing should be silent in all techniques of Nadi shodhana, ensuring that it is not forced or restricted in any way. As the ratio and duration increases the breath becomes very light and subtle. Increased ratios and

breath retention should not be attained at the expense of relaxation rhythm and awareness. The flow of breath must be smooth with no jerks throughout the practice. Always use the muscles of the chest and diaphragm and practice yogic breathing. If one of the nostrils is blocked perform jala neti breath balancing exercises before commencing. Under no circumstances should the breath be forced. Never breathe through the mouth. Proceed carefully and only under expert guidance. At the slightest sign of discomfort, reduce the duration of inhalation, inner retention, exhalation and external retention and, if necessary, discontinue the practice for the day. Nadi shodhana should never be rushed. Nadi shodhana should be practiced after asanas and warming or cooling pranayamas, and before bhramari and ujjayi pranayamas, the best time to practice is from 4 to 6 am; however, it may be performed anytime during the day except after meals.

Benefits:

- It purifies the body and helps in releasing toxins and improves the flow of oxygen into the body.
- It reduces stress levels and provides relief in anxiety and depression.
- It helps to improve concentration and improves brain function.
- It increases vitality and improves the functioning of all the internal organs.
- It is known to clear all pranic/energy blockages.

Caution:

- None. This pranayama can be practiced by all.





BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA – THE TENSION RELIEVER

The Bhramari pranayama derives its name from the black Indian bumble bee called Bhramari and involves producing a sound which imitates that of the black bee.

Instructions: Sit in a comfortable meditation asana such as padmasana or Siddhasana .The spinal cord should be erect, the head straight and the hands rested on the knees in chin Mudra or jnana mudra. Close the eyes gently and keep the lips very gently closed with the teeth slightly separated throughout the practice. This allows sound vibration to be heard and felt more definitely in the brain. Make sure that the Jaws are relaxed. Raise the arms sideways and bend the elbows, bringing the hands to the ears. Use the index finger or middle finger to plug the ears by gently pressing the cartilage between the cheek and the ear. Resting the other four fingers on the head, bring the awareness to the center of the head where ajna chakra is located and keep the body absolutely still. Breathe in through the nose and then exhale slowly in a controlled manner while making a deep, steady humming sound like that of a black bee. The humming sound should be smooth, even and continuous for the duration of the exhalation. The sound should be soft and mellow, making the front of the skull reverberate. At the end of exhalation, breathe in deeply and repeat the process. Perform 5 rounds.

Once the basic form of Bhramari has been mastered, jalandhara and moola Bandha may be included into the practice in conjunction with internal breath retention as explained before. Do not strain at the time of performing kumbhaka, one or two seconds is sufficient at first. The duration may be increased gradually as the technique is mastered. When the head has returned to the upright position and the ears are plugged, slowly exhale producing the humming sound.

The best time to practice is late at night or in the early morning, on an empty stomach, as there is no external noise to interfere with internal perception. You may however, practice it at any time to relieve mental tension, providing the surroundings are peaceful.

Benefits:

- Bhramari relieves stress and cerebral tension,
- Helps in alleviating anger and anxiety and reduces stress
- Helps in treating Insomnia,
- It helps in lowering blood pressure
- It strengthens and improves the voice and eliminates throats ailments.
- Helps alleviate migraines.

Caution:

- should be avoided by those with high blood pressure or cardiac problems. In warm weather or in a heated room, its practice should be limited to two minutes.

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA – the breathing of a victor

The Sanskrit word 'ujjayi' means 'to win over' or 'victorious'. It is derived from the root 'ji' which means 'to conquer' or 'to acquire by conquest', and the prefix 'ud', which means 'bondage'. Ujjayi is therefore the pranayama which gives freedom from bonded. It is also known as psychic breath as it leads to subtle states of mind which together give freedom from bondage

Instructions: Sit in any comfortable position, preferably in a meditation posture. Gently close the eyes and relax the whole body. Take the Awareness to the breath in the nostrils and allowed the breathing to become calm and rhythmic. After some time, transfer the awareness to the throat. Try to feel or to imagine that the breath is being drawn in and out through the throat and not through the nostrils, as if inhalation and exhalation are taking place through a small hole in the throat. As the breathing becomes lower and deeper, gently contract the glottis so that a soft snoring sound like the breathing of a sleeping baby is produced in the throat. If this is practiced correctly there will be simultaneously contraction of the abdomen. This happens by itself without any effort being made. Both inhalation and exhalation should be long, deep and controlled. Practice yogic breathing while concentrating on the sound produced by the breath in the throat. The sound of the breath should not be very loud. It should be just audible to the practitioner but not to another person unless they are sitting very close. When this breathing has been mastered, fold the tongue back into khechari mudra. If the tongue becomes tired release it, while continuing the ujjayi breathing, when the tongue is rested, again fold it back. Practice for 10 to 20 minutes. Ujjayi may be practiced in any position, standing, sitting or lying. Those suffering from slipped disc or vertebral Spondylitis may practice Ujjayi in vajrasana or makarasana. Try to relax the face as much as possible. Do not contract the throat too strongly. The contraction should be slight and applied continuously throughout the practice. Do not control the facial muscles at any time during the practice of Ujjayi.

Benefits:

- Ujjayi is classified as a tranquilizing Pranayama and has a heating effect on the body.
- This practice is used in Yoga therapy to suit nervous system and calm the mind.
- It has a profoundly relaxing effect at the psychic level.
- It helps to relieve Insomnia and may be practiced in shavasana just before sleep.
- The basic form without breath retention or bandhas slows down the heart rate and is useful for people suffering from high blood pressure.

Caution:

- Those suffering from heart disease should be careful and do the basic breathing only.





SHEETALI PRANAYAMA – the cooling pranayama

Sheetali Pranayama also known as the cooling Breath is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Sheetali’ which means cold.

Instructions: Sit comfortably in Vajrasana (cross legged position). Open the mouth and extend the tongue all the way out of the mouth and roll it from the sides to form a tube. Inhale through the tube. Hold the breath and lower the chin to the chest in Jalandhara Bandha. Continue to hold the breath for 6 to 8 seconds. When ready to exhale, lift the chin up, close the right nostril with the right thumb. Using Ujjayi breath, exhale slowly through the left nostril with slight force. This completes one round. Do at least 10 rounds.

Benefits:

- It cools the body and the nervous system.
- It controls and reduces stress, anger and anxiety.
- It cures insomnia.
- It reduces and controls Acidity.
- It prevents premature greying of hair and hair fall.
- It makes prana or energy to flow more freely through the body.
- It regulates the endocrine system.
- It aids in blood purification.
- It strengthens the teeth and the gums.

Caution:

- It should be avoided by persons suffering from common cold, asthma, flu or low blood pressure.
- Should be avoided in cold areas.
- Should be avoided by people with sensitive teeth.

BAHAYA PRANAYAMA

This pranayama is derived from the Sanskrit term 'bahya,' which means outside presumable because in this pranayama, the breath is left outside for a while.

Instructions: Sit comfortably in Lotus pose. Keep your eyes closed gently and your spine and head should be in a straight line. Take a deep breath and then exhale completely. After you exhale hold your breath and push your stomach inward and upward as much as you can and gently move your chin down to touch the chest. Hold this position for 5-10 seconds and then release slowly and gently raise your head to the starting position. This is one round. Repeat 5-10 times. In case you have cervical issues, do not bring the chin down.

Generally, the breathing ratio of 1:2:3 is maintained throughout. Which means the inhalation is for one second or its multiples, exhalation is for 2 seconds or its multiples and holding the breath is for 3 seconds or its multiples.

Benefits:

- It improves digestion and revitalises the digestive system
- It is very helpful in all ailments related to the reproductive organs
- It is very helpful in diabetic care
- It is very useful in all ailments related to the excretory system and the urinary disorders
- Is very helpful in curing constipation

Caution:

- It should not be attempted by pregnant women or during the menstruation cycle
- It should always be done on an empty stomach
- It should not be done by people suffering from high BP or heart ailments





UDGEETH PRANAYAMA

The name of this Pranayama is derived from the Sanskrit term 'Udgeeth' which means a 'profound and rhythmic chant'. This pranayama involves chanting of 'OM' with deep breathing

Instructions: Sit comfortably in the lotus pose or the Padmasana. Keep your eyes closed gently and your spine and head should be in a straight line. Inhale deeply through your nostrils till the lungs are full with air and then exhales while chanting the word Om. Try and stretch the 'O' for as long as you can comfortably and then end with the 'M' like "OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMM". This is one round. Repeat 6-8 times. Effort should be made to gradually increase the inhalation and exhalation to a minute each. The OM sound has been scientifically proven to resemble the sound produced by the vibrations in the universe and hence has a great deal of spiritual connotation as it helps us connect with the universe.

Benefits:

- It helps to calm the mind and reduces stress and anxiety
- It helps in anger management
- It is a cure for insomnia
- It helps in curing high blood pressure and hypertension
- It helps in all mental ailments and is known to improve memory

Caution:

- It should be done on an empty stomach or 2-3 hours after a meal



MANAMAYA KOSHA – THE MENTAL SHEATH

The word 'Mana' means the mind. This kosha are the thoughts, feelings and emotion that govern the mind. This makes us experience the pain/sorrow and joy/pleasures of life. It is through this prism of the mind that we register the five senses and decides our likes and dislikes. The mind controls all our body functions , conscious and the subconscious and the voluntary and involuntary. This is where are emotions and our reaction to them is centred.

This mind functions on three levels:

- Conscious: this operates the physical body and the mental emotions. It also links us to the external.
- Subconscious: this is where the mind stores all experiences and keeps record of all that has gone by.
- Unconscious mind: this is the truest form of the soul or atman , whose knowledge and powers are unfathomable.

It is not for nothing that we use the phrase – “prisoner of his/her mind” for a person who is stuck in the negativity of this sheath and is not able to tap the higher realms of his/her mind to refine his/her thinking and is caught in a trap of his/her own making.

This Kosha directly impacts the other outer koshas and hence need to be healthy and gratified. A healthy mind lives in a healthy body and vice versa is a known fact. It's the vice versa that is significant. A tense, anxious or a stressed mind can lead to a large number of physical and mental ailments. In the same vein, modern science has acknowledged that a healthy and resolute mind can help the body ward off even the most life-threatening ailments.

For its health and rejuvenation, Yoga recommends Pratyahara (mental withdrawing of the senses,) to keep the mind calm and balanced. Pratyahara trains the body to withdraw from negative senses like wrong food, impressions, feelings and wrong associations. Pratyahara thus strengthens the mind's immunity to reject negative influences. Just as a healthy body resists toxins and pathogens, a healthy mind starts rejecting whatever is negative for the mind. There are four main forms of pratyahara: indriya-pratyahara-control of the senses; karma-pratyahara-control of action; prana-pratyahara-control of prana; and mano-pratyahara-withdrawal of mind from the senses. Each has its special methods. Visualization is one of the simplest forms of pratyahara because it clears the mind of all negativity and creates a foundation for positive thoughts. Pratyahara practices help us extricate ourselves from the momentum of life in general and other influences and helps us find peace and serenity within us creating a heightened self-awareness and inner strength and prepares the individual for tapping his higher levels of consciousness.

“the vital force or prana derives its energy from thoughts. Thus, those who can control the mind and its thoughts are no longer afflicted by fear” - Taittiriya Upanishad

This is becoming increasingly relevant in the post COVID world where anxiety and depression caused due to unprecedented disruption in people's work and social life is aggravating digestive disorders, insomnia, fatigue heart disease, and other health issues. Mental health should not be allowed to slip because the lack of it can cause considerable damage. We need a healthy mind to live a more satisfying and productive life.

PRATYAHARA FOR STRENGTHENING THE MANAMAYA KOSHA

Yoga recommends Pratyahara (mental withdrawing of the senses,) to keep the mind calm and balanced. Pratyahara or the 'withdrawal of the senses' is the fifth limb in Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga, scripted in the 2nd century BCE. The Sanskrit term 'Pratyahara' is derived from two Sanskrit words: 'prati' meaning weaning away from and 'ahara' meaning food. Food here is symbolic and includes all that we take in; food, negative thoughts, emotions, impressions, feelings and wrong associations. The essence of weaning away from food as in the name - Pratyahara is essentially a practice that strengthens the individual's mind to reject anything that is negative or unhealthy, which in this context would mean unhealthy food, emotions and thoughts.

There are four main forms of pratyahara: indriya-pratyahara-control of the senses; karma-pratyahara-control of action; prana-pratyahara-control of prana; and mano-pratyahara-withdrawal of mind from the senses. Each has its special methods. Visualization is one of the simplest forms of pratyahara because it clears the mind of all negativity and creates a foundation for positive thoughts. Pratyahara practices help us extricate ourselves from the momentum of life in general and other influences and helps us find peace and serenity within us creating a heightened self-awareness and inner strength and prepares the individual for tapping his higher levels of consciousness.

A lot of people think of this practice as something which trains the mind to block emotions. On the contrary, the practice strengthens the conscious and subconscious minds to accept emotions devoid of fear and then reject what is unhealthy. This is possible because regular practice sharpens the mind to be more discerning of what is good and what is negative and unhealthy.

Once the mind is discerning, it tends to ingest and absorb what is positive. This change makes the mind fearless and calmer as it now has the ability to process even the most negative and remain unscathed by it. The person no longer feels agitated but is now calmer and he/she doesn't react instantly, in turn is able to respond fittingly.

Pratyahara also helps the individual let go of all negativity and negative emotions and relationships. This is the first step towards living a more complete, blissful and productive life. this withdrawal is essential if one has to move to the higher plane of the higher kosha which takes you to the path of wisdom and eternal bliss.





TYPES OF PRATYAHARA

The four types of Pratyaharas briefly are as follows:

INDRIYA PRATYAHARA: this is a Sanskrit term which means withdrawal of Senses; in this the practitioner either focuses on his/her breath or on the third eye to the exclusion of the senses. This frees the mind from the sensory overload that one subjects it to day in and out. Exposure to laptops, vehicular traffic, nonstop use of mobile phones, TV etc has added to this sensory overload that weighs the mind down. By withdrawing for a while, we help the mind rest allowing it to revitalise and strengthen itself. The yoga guru may guide you to different focal areas such as the chakras, and their unique characteristics including position, colour, and number of petals etc.

PRANA PRATYAHARA: in Sanskrit means withdrawal of Prana or breath. Yoga equates prana or breath to vital life force that keeps us alive and healthy. This prana is precious to an extent that Yoga believes that this breath count of each person is predetermined by karma during our birth and hence should not be wasted. A person can lengthen their life span by expanding this breath or prana. This pratyahara helps to regulate, harmonize, control and expand the prana or breath. This where the Pranayama asanas for the energy sheath also play a role here.

KARMA PRATYAHARA: in Sanskrit means control of all karma or action. Yoga has a strong belief in karma or action and believes that we are the product of our karma or actions. If we create good karma, we in turn create a better life for ourselves. This pratyahara involves withdrawing from all negative actions or karma. Regular practice sharpens the subconscious and we become more discerning when it comes to understanding the difference between good and bad actions. This helps us live in harmony with our eco system and builds greater social harmony around ourselves at all times.

MANO PRATYAHARA: in Sanskrit means Withdrawal of Mind. This involves withdrawing attention from all that is external and focusing inwards toward the and pure earless soul and tapping its energy. This is the ultimate as it now lays the foundation of the journey towards becoming one with the universe and being enlightened and in a state of eternal bliss.

At Carnoustie, the gurus guide you through the various stages carefully so that you can share your fears and anxieties that might obstruct you initially. Over a period of time you will then be ready to face your own Yogic journey.

Simple Techniques for Pratyahara

As explained in the previous chapter, the actual preparation for Pratyahara begins at the Pranayama stage itself and that is why Pratyahara is considered a vital bridge between the Pranamaya Kosha and the Vijnanamaya Kosha and the Anandamaya Kosha. Pratyahara accompanied by Pranayama breathing, gives you a sense of calm at the exclusion of all that is external. As your breath becomes deeper and calmer so does this feeling of tranquillity as it eases and calms every cell of the body and helps it soothe, heal and perform optimally. Very soon you get the feeling that your entire body and each cell are breathing in positive energy in the form of oxygen and expelling negative energy and toxins with each exhalation. Continue this for as long as you can with a sense of contentment and gratitude for being alive. It is fascinating how by doing this simple exercise one frees one's self from all external noise and clutter and begins to work his way towards the inward journey of the higher koshas. By detaching yourself from the external world you keep rest to your senses. This is the true spirit of pratyahara, or withdrawal of the senses.

The second way of doing this when you begin to focus on hearing the sound of the breath as it moves in and out of the body, while also being simultaneously aware of the movement of the diaphragm and the stomach muscles as they aid the lungs in propelling the entry and exit of breath more deeply. The simplest technique is to imagine the sound of 'au' while you inhale and the sound of 'hum' or 'mmmm' as you exhale. For beginners the sounds can be made audible but as you get hold of the technique, this sound is not made audible externally, but is conjured and received in the mind. The sound vibrations create a wonderful harmonising rhythm making the person calmer. As you progress you notice how the breathing and the sound becomes so wonderfully synchronised till such time one moves towards a more progressive state where you cannot feel the breath and only the sound can be heard in the mind. This is the beginning of one-point awareness, where you have withdrawn from everything external. This is the foundation of Pratyahara.

In easy steps, this process would be as follows:

- Sit comfortably in the lotus pose with your spine and head straight and your eyes gently shut.
- Breathe comfortably and start observing the movement of the diaphragm and the stomach as the former rises and falls and the latter expands and contracts to help the lungs inhale and exhale deeply without applying undue force.
- Become aware of this breath by focussing on it and imagining the pure oxygen coming in and purifying and energising and the exhalation driving out all the toxins and the negative emotions.
- This focus will make you feel as though your whole body is breathing in and out.
- Now feel this breath along with a sound of "ooo" or 'au' as you inhale and 'mmmm' or 'hum' as you exhale. First make this sound audible and then let it be heard only in the mind.
- You will realise that your entire being can only hear the sound to the exclusion of everything else. This is Pratyahara of the senses.

Another very simple technique of Pratyahara is the Shavasana or the corpse pose. The name Shavasana is derived from the Sanskrit term 'sava' meaning a corpse as for an onlooker the person seems to be lying absolutely still and motionless.

Instructions:

- Lie flat on your back, preferably without the support of props or cushions, unless they are absolutely necessary. One can use a soft thin pillow to give support to the neck if you experience discomfort or are used to sleeping with a pillow. Keep the legs outstretched and

shoulder width apart and let the feet and toes tilt a little outwards towards the mat. Keep the arms spread-out a little at an angle of 45 degrees from the torso on each side, leaving the palms open and facing upwards. Now start focusing your awareness of each body part, gradually moving from head to toe. For e.g. first start from the right foot toes and then move up to the thigh and then to the left leg toes and again up till you finally reach the head. Start relaxing each body part as you move upwards from toes to head in the most stress-free and calm manner without fidgeting. Keep the eyes gently shut and once the body is totally relaxed, start focussing on the breathing and become aware of how the breath is inhaled and exhaled by the body. Visualise all positive energy coming in and revitalising every cell of the body with each inhalation and imagine all negative thoughts and emotions and toxins being expelled from the body with each exhalation.

- Gradually the focus on the breath will make the individual oblivious of everything else around him/her. As the body relaxes, you might go into a deep slumber. Try avoiding that by keeping one's self awake and do not allow the head to tilt on one side. Stay in the pose for as long as you are comfortable, the recommended time being anything between 10-20 minutes. Then gradually roll to your right side and then use the right hand as support to lift yourself up and open the eyes slowly. Do not rush yourself and do not attempt to sit up straight. Always roll to your right and then gradually sit up into Sukhasana (Easy Pose). Take a few deep breaths and gradually return awareness to the external environment.

Benefits

- It is an excellent pratyahara technique that relaxes the body and calms the brain. It is very useful in curing anxiety and giving relief from chronic stress.
- It helps in alleviating depression
- It helps in curing frequent headaches and in chronic migraine
- It rejuvenates and energises the body and mind
- Is useful for people suffering from digestive disorders
- It helps in insomnia
- It also helps in keeping the blood pressure under check

DEEPER PRATYAHARA IN SHAVASANA

For a more profound pratyahara experience in shavasana, each sense organ is made to relax in preparation of a withdrawal in the following manner:

Eyes: our sight is the most dominant sense organ that makes us aware of our surroundings. Hence shutting this is the first step towards withdrawal or pratyahara. During Shavasana the practitioner is advised to shut the eyes gently. But for a more profound experience, one is advised to lightly close the eyes and then lightly lift the upper eyelid so that it doesn't not press against the lower one. This should be done without any pressure or unease. Once you are comfortable. Lower the pupils downwards giving the impression of looking inwards to the core. Hold the position throughout without straining.

Tongue: relax the jaw and make yourself comfortable. Once relaxed, let the tongue rest away from the upper palate

gently behind the lower teeth. Do not withdraw the tongue as it would make you uncomfortable. The corners of the mouth should not be strained at all and the lips should not be pressed against each other tightly.

Nose: focus on the bridge of the nose or the centre between the eyes and let the breathing be calm and effortless.

Ears: to relax your ears focus on the cheekbone quietly melting into the ear lobe and you will feel the tension leave the ears as they get more relaxed.

Skin: feel the skin melt into nothingness by imagining it slowly falling to the ground like the softest silk. You can also divide your face into four sections and work on each one of them one by one.

While doing this imagine a turtle withdrawing into its shell. While withdrawn, the shell protects and also becomes its protector, its brain and its sense organs. Similarly, as you withdraw to your inner core, your indestructible and infallible soul protects and guides. For those who have less time, they can do pratyahara by just sitting in a corner and slowly visualising withdrawal into a happier world. Some even think of running in open green fields or lying on a flowery bed by gently shutting their eyes and focussing on the breathing and the happy visualisation. This can help a person overcome extreme stress at work where you can't lie down!

It is important to note that Visualization is one of the simplest forms of pratyahara because it clears the mind of all negativity and creates a foundation for positive thoughts. Pratyahara practices help us extricate ourselves from the momentum of life in general and other influences and helps us find peace and serenity within us creating a heightened self-awareness and inner strength and prepares the individual for tapping his higher levels of consciousness.



Pratyahara a vital bridge between the Pranamaya Kosha and the Vijnanamaya Kosha and the Anandamaya Kosha

Pratyahara is a Sanskrit term meaning "withdrawal of the senses". In our fast-paced world, this withdrawal offers us peace and sanctity, with many describing it as their personal healing haven that they can choose to seek refuge in at their will.

It is a fairly simple process that an individual can attempt in the comfort of their home. The actual preparation for Pratyahara begins at the Pranayama stage itself and that is why Pratyahara is considered a vital bridge between the Pranamaya Kosha and the Vijnanamaya Kosha and the Anandamaya Kosha.

This interconnectivity between all the koshas is also elaborated in the Ashtanga Yoga written by the great sage Patanjali thousands of years back. This concept talks about the eight limbs, with each limb helping the proponent to move closer to the ultimate goal of self-realisation of one's purest form. Practitioners are advised to move forward in a specific order as they move towards the eternal state of bliss. The first two limbs of the ashtanga yoga – the Yama and the Niyamas are all about making a moral resolve or vow of Ahimsa (non-violence in thought, word and deed), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (abstention from stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy or 'right use of energy') Aparigraha (control of unnecessary greed or non-hoarding), Saucha (cleanliness), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (self-discipline), Svadhyaya (study of the self and of the texts), Isvara Pranidhana (surrender to the higher power). They together set the tone for the asanas and the pranayama already explained in detail in the previous chapters, as well as for the different types of pratyahara discussed in chapter 14.

In this chapter we will focus on using the pranayams to get geared for the pratyahara. Please note that we would not be able to derive maximum benefit from our Pranayama or breathing exercises if we do them only at the physical level. One needs to involve one's mental faculties to use this phase as a transformational one and one that connect you to the next higher kosha.

To do this, one should relax and gradually become increasingly aware of the breathing patterns. Ensuring that the breathing is smooth and not rushed or forced and become mentally aware of how the diaphragm moves to make space for the lungs and the abdomen to inhale as deeply as we can and how it then pushes downward with the contraction of the abdominal muscles as we expel air. As you increase awareness you will see how the breathing becomes increasingly smooth and soundless and how your mind frees itself from the clutter of random thoughts.

Now the focus should shift on how the breath nourishes our body. When you breathe in experience the inflow of oxygen and feel it nourishing the mind and body and when you breathe out imagine the toxins being expelled with it. These toxins also include all the negative thoughts and emotions that cause distress.

Now gradually also bring focus to the body first crown to toes and then the reverse gradually becoming aware of each muscle and organ as you move your focus and imagine each part being nourished and then being cleansed of toxins and negative energy.

As you do this over and over again accompanied by the Pranayama breathing, you will feel a sense of calm prevail at the exclusion of all that is external. This is withdrawal and pratyahara beginning to happen. As your breath becomes deeper and calmer so does this feeling of tranquillity as it eases and calms every cell of the body and helps it soothe, heal and perform optimally. Very soon you get the feeling that your entire body and each cell are breathing in positive energy in the form of oxygen and expelling negative energy and toxins with each exhalation.

Continue this for as long as you can with a sense of contentment and gratitude for being alive. It is fascinating how by doing this simple exercise one frees one's self from all external noise and clutter and begins to work his way towards the inward journey of the higher koshas. By detaching yourself from the external world you keep rest to your senses. This is the true spirit of pratyahara, or withdrawal of the senses.

The second way of doing this when you begin to focus on hearing the sound of the breath as it moves in and out of the body, while also being simultaneously aware of the movement of the diaphragm and the stomach muscles as they aid the lungs in

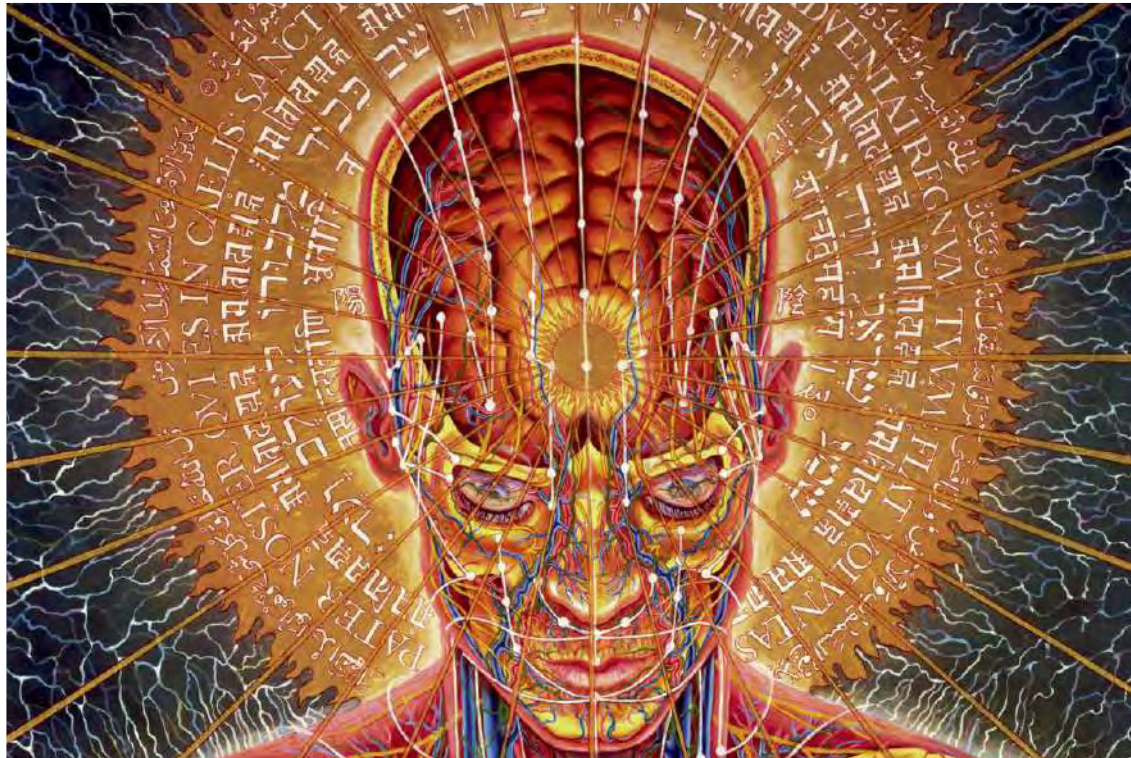


propelling the entry and exit of breath more deeply. The simplest technique is to imagine the sound of 'au' while you inhale and the sound of 'hum' or 'mmmm' as you exhale. For beginners the sounds can be made audible but as you get hold of the technique, this sound is not made audible externally, but is conjured and received in the mind.

The sound vibrations create a wonderful harmonising rhythm making the person calmer. As you progress you notice how the breathing and the sound becomes so wonderfully synchronised till such time one moves towards a more progressive state where you cannot feel the breath and only the sound can be heard in the mind. This is the beginning of one-point awareness, where you have withdrawn from everything external. This is the foundation of Pratyahara.

So, if we were to encapsulate this process in easy to understand steps, they would be as follows:

- Sit comfortably in the lotus pose with your spine and head straight and your eyes gently shut.
- Breathe comfortably and start observing the movement of the diaphragm and the stomach as the former rises and falls and the latter expands and contracts to help the lungs inhale and exhale deeply without applying undue force.
- Become aware of this breath by focussing on it and imagining the pure oxygen coming in and purifying and energising and the exhalation driving out all the toxins and the negative emotions.
- This focus will make you feel as though your whole body is breathing in and out.
- Now feel this breath along with a sound of "ooo' or 'au' as you inhale and 'mmmm' or 'hum' as you exhale. First make this sound audible and then let it be heard only in the mind.
- You will realise that your entire being can only hear the sound to the exclusion of everything else. This is Pratyahara of the senses.



VIJANAMAYA KOSHA - THE SHEATH OF WISDOM

Vijnanamaya Kosha is the fourth of the five Koshas (sheaths). This kosha is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vijnana' meaning wisdom. This sheath is the one that controls our perceptive intellect and determines who we are as people. The Vijnanamaya Kosha is also known as the sheath of intuitive knowledge/wisdom. Our intellect gives us the ability to discern between right and wrong and between good and evil etc. This intellect can be driven either by our ego which is shaped by our experiences and memories stored in the subconscious or by our intuitive powers that we can tap into if we move to a higher plane of thinking-or the path of wisdom.

The “ego-driven” intellect is mostly destructive producing a very narcissist personality that is selfish and self-centred. If the person does not get what he wants, he refuses to reason and experiences anxiety, pain and suffering. While if our intellect is driven from intuitive powers which are sharpened when we tap into the wisdom of our purest inner core where the/soul or atman resides, we take actions that makes us happy and content and we experience all the positive feelings.

As we practice meditation, our intellect is sharpened and is not controlled by the ego but by pure intuitive wisdom. The chief objective of the meditation is to give ourselves this access to higher thinking and being. It is this sheath, is taken care of properly can help us seek our “higher wisdom” and eternal truth. This sheath is responsible for our inner evolution and has a bearing on our ethics, morals and integrity.

One this kosha is reached, the individual goes beyond the awareness of his physical attributes and environment and enters the sacrosanct space of the higher consciousness and thinking. This aspect of ourselves helps us understand life and its elements at the deepest. Working on this sheath helps us receive messages form the deepest levels of our understanding as we get closer and closer to the ultimate truth of the Atman which is the purest and hence the wisest. Yoga recommends the practice of dharana or mental focus by concentrating on an object and dhyana, or meditation on the divine, as ways to gradually help our minds to focus and derive strength from our indestructible and harmonious deeper level of consciousness.

Dharana and Dhyana are deep concentrative meditation practices of getting the mind to focus and hold concentration on a single point or object excluding everything else, to strengthen this kosha. This trains the mind to be static enabling it to see

clearly by getting in touch with the absolute truth. It helps the individual to tap into the higher levels of consciousness which refines our understanding and wisdom in sync with the universal reality. No wonder we were always told to 'think clearly'! This single focus cures the inner conflicts that disturb us and brings peace and mindfulness. A peaceful mind has a greater ability to tap into our inner wisdom and is more productive. Once we tap into this higher consciousness, we are no longer disturbed or stressed over the trivialities of our daily issues.

As we do deeper into meditation, the mind becomes increasingly calm and steady. It awakens one's self to one's own indestructibility as one merges with one's eternal soul or atman- which is our purest self, untouched and pristine. This merging helps us become aware of our unfathomable capacity and power. The power of meditation annihilates all foulness and vices in the practitioner making him a magnet for all positive things. The practitioner will also notice how he begins to have a greater influence with whoever, he or she comes in contact with. He/she is able to now make better decisions and is at peace with his/her shortcomings.

Meditation is also a self-evolutionary practice. It helps you discover strength that you thought you never had. It makes the mind and the intellect sharper and increases productivity. One is able to make better decisions and stay calm even in the most challenging circumstances. One is able to control one's emotions and have greater clarity. Nothing will be puzzling and troublesome- it will all be clearer and definite. Sports persons and people in senior positions who are required to be extremely focussed and calm in all situations benefit a great deal from this practice.

The Vijnanamaya Kosha is also known as the sheath of intuitive knowledge/wisdom. Our intellect gives us the discriminative capability that helps to differentiate between good and evil, between right and wrong etc.

The intellect can be looked upon as having two components:

- One that is controlled by our ego and driven by our past memories and impressions (samskaras).
- And the other which is controlled by our pure intuition.

The "ego-driven" intellect most often leads to actions which result in pain and suffering, while actions prompted by pure intuition and discriminative knowledge will give us satisfaction, peace and happiness.

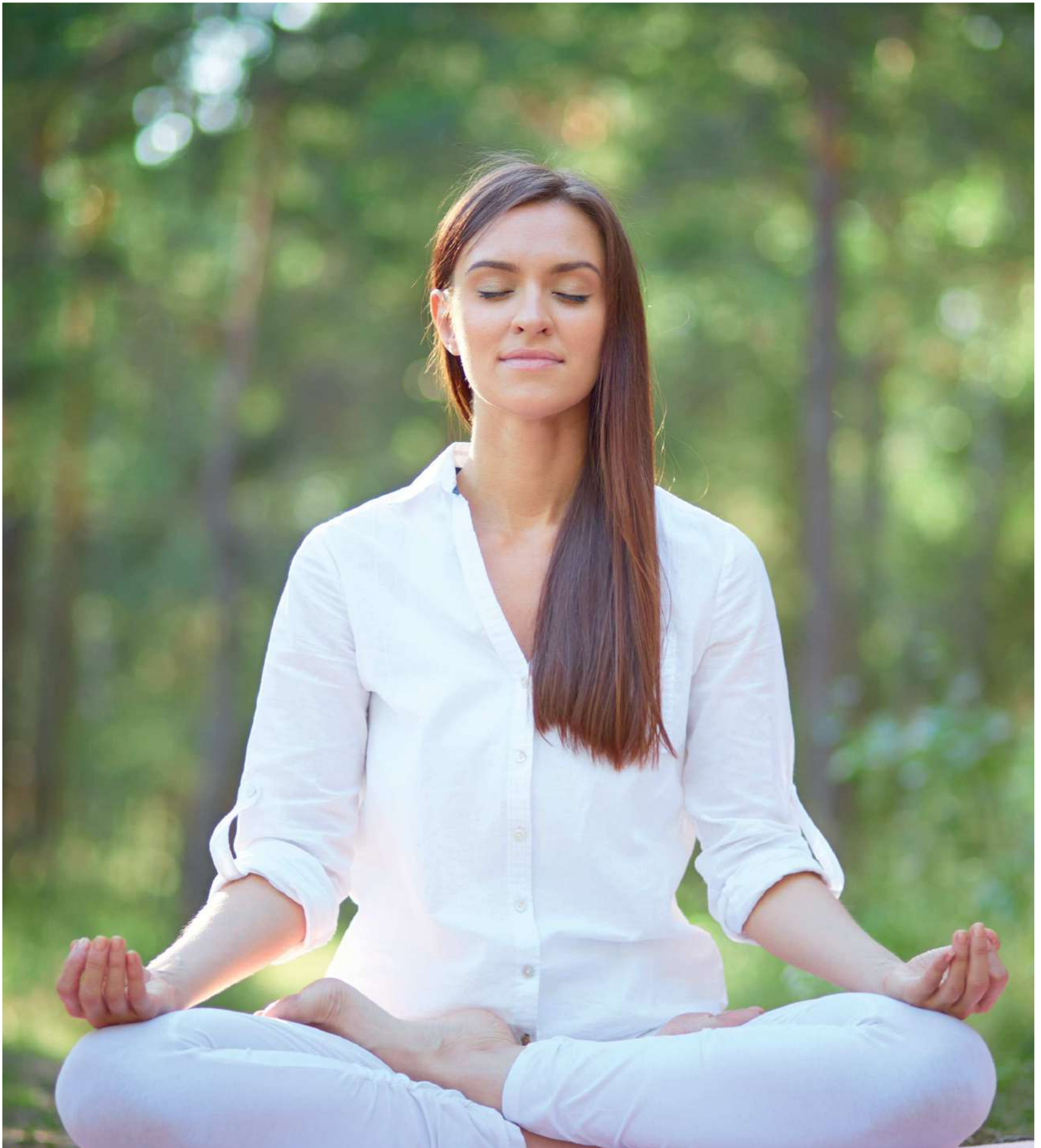
When one practices meditation, their mind becomes purified and their intellect can then begin to depend more and more on this pure intuitive wisdom rather than being so influenced by the ego.

This is the sheath of wisdom that lies underneath the processing, thinking aspect of mind, or the sheath of mental activities (**Manomaya Kosha**). It knows, decides, judges, and discriminates between this and that, between all that is useful and not useful. A major part of Sadhana (spiritual practice) is gaining ever increasing access to this level of our being. It is the level that prompts our "higher wisdom" to seek Truth, to inquire within, in search of the true Self or eternal center of consciousness.

Vijnanamaya Kosha, as the conscious body, lies deeper than the previously described Koshas and it also remains interactive and dependant on them. This sheath is responsible for inner growth, for ethics and morals. It allows us to reach beyond mundane existence into wisdom and subtle knowledge as it actively seeks to move from the exoteric to the esoteric; from the world observed by the eyes to the inner space behind the eyes.

Independent of any specific religion, the studies of holy texts like the Bible, the Torah, the Bhagavad Gita and other texts from the great sages of antiquity, will lead us to the same realization because all religions are based on this same truth. In this sheath we recognize and return to the "real" life, the life that both preserved and outlasts the body.

By meditating on, and exploring the Vijnanamaya Kosha, and then going inward, to and through the remaining and final Kosha (Anandamaya Kosha), thus arriving at the "Self" (Atman).



UNDERSTANDING THE FINE LINE BETWEEN DHARANA AND DHYANA

Dhyana is the seventh step in Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga, preceded by the more commonly known aspects of yoga such as asana (physical postures) and pranayama (breath control). Dhyana is derived from the Sanskrit term that means meditation.

Dharana on the other hand are the learning techniques or simpler exercises that help us prepare for Dhyana – the meditation. Dharna as nothing but concentration. This concentration can be built by focussing your attention /mind in an object or an abstract idea either internal or external. Practicing dharana prepares us and makes us aware of how the mind and its thoughts can interrupt our meditative practice. Dharana trains us to not fight these thoughts and get agitated in the process, but to let them flow and yet not disturb the focus and concentration, ultimately making them melt away and vanishing while the practitioner moves to deeper meditation or Dhyana. Thus, it builds concentration and the capacity to continually prevent the mind from wandering in different directions and coming back to the object of its concentration

We can use the analogy to understand the difference between the two. When we start driving, we are anxious and more careful and tend to get upset with any traffic disruption. All the attention is on the driving and we tend not to even hear the radio that might be playing in the car and get irritated if the co-driver or passenger says something or checks us. There are times where we might push the accelerator a bit more and brake even when it is not need. This is the state of dharana where we are struggling to concentrate and focus on the task at hand- driving smoothly.

However, in due course we are able to drive without straining and also can catch the music playing on the radio while navigating the traffic. We can also chat with others in the car and sometimes over the phone on speaker and yet not let it impact our driving. Our feet work pretty much automatically and we don't have to make a conscious effort. This is the state of dhyana.

Concentration (dharana) sustained for a longer time is dhyana or meditation. The mind is more stably anchored at this stage and for a longer stretch of time. When you fail to acknowledge where concentration ends and meditation begins, you know you are on the right track. It is important to note that those who practice Pratyahara and Pranayama are able to concentrate in Dharana a lot more effectively than the others.

PREPARING FOR PRACTICE OF DHARANA AND DHYANA

Dharana and Dhyana are two meditative techniques recommended by ancient Yoga texts and philosophy. It is recommended that one should move into meditation, only once one has mastered pratyahara or it will be futile. Pratyahara trains the individual to focus and concentrate, a pre requisite for a good meditative practice. Meditation is much more than just concentration as it helps the mind to comprehend and develop intuitive knowledge by helping the individual tap into the indestructible energy of the universe and his/her inner consciousness.

Meditation is the most powerful mental stimulant. It nourishes the mind and makes it healthy and strong. Once the mind is healthy, the body and its various organs show significant improvement as at the end of the day it is the nerve impulses from the mind that control the body functions. The meditative practice generates positive revitalizing and nourishing vibrations that infuse every cell of the body.

Yoga texts recommend that you choose a quiet airy place within the house or outdoors for practicing meditation. Avoid cluttered places as it disturbs the vibrations making the entire exercise futile. Most yogis choose quiet green places or keep separate room dedicated to their practice as they treat the practice as a spiritual exercise. Yogis chose to meditate on mountain tops or by water bodies or under trees as the space too lends its positive vibrations to the practice. It's a different matter that an extremely evolved soul can meditate even in the noisiest environment! But it takes time and perseverance to reach that stage.

One has to leave all negative thoughts and ego behind and make one's self comfortable in the lotus pose with calm serenity. Meeting one's inner consciousness is like meeting the supreme power and hence should be done with a pious and a reverent mind.

The recommended time for meditation is the Brahmamuhurta ie from 4-6 am. But given our hectic schedules, we can choose anytime as long as we have a two-hour gap from our meals. Early morning practice is strongly recommended as it helps you start a day on a very positive note and this positivity helps you handle the stress at work better and keep harmony with everything around you.

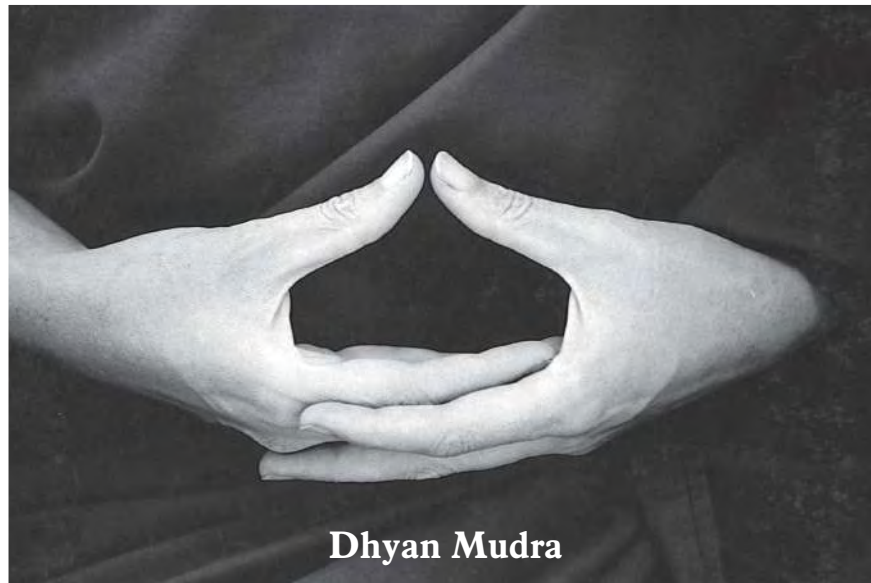
Trained Yogis believe that one should face the north or the east while meditating as it has the best magnetic force and gives positive vibrations. They also prefer dark places very little natural light as it helps soothe nerves. Bright lights and sunlight distract and don't allow peaceful concentration. They believed that mountain tops and places near water are best suited for Dhyana or meditation as they augment the energy that is produced in our bodies during meditation.

CONCENTRATION EXERCISES TO BUILD APPETITE FOR A MORE REFINED MEDITATIVE PRACTICE

Some people can be overwhelmed if they are pushed into a deep meditative practice without adequate pratyahara or other mental preparatory exercises. Some are known to complain that they get even more anxious when they meditate. To help make the transition to a higher practice more harmonious and peaceful, we suggest the following mental exercises. Please note that in all of these exercises, do not get overwhelmed or agitated by the thoughts that might stop you from focusing. Let them come and flow without diverting your focus from the exercise. You will gradually see/feel the thoughts melt away and you will feel a lot lighter and at peace.

- Sit in a lotus pose in a dark and quiet room and place a lit candle about 3 feet away and focus on the flame.
- Sit by a stream or flowing water and focus on the sound of the water flowing.
- Sit under a tree and focus on the sounds of nature; the breeze or the chirping of birds, anything.
- Read a few pages of a book and put it down. Now close your eyes and recall the pages in your mind.
- Sit in a lotus pose and imagine doing what you love the most in the beautiful lap of nature.
- Sit in a lotus pose and let your mind wander through your dream holiday destination.
- Lie down on the grass and gaze at the sky or the stars.
- Sit out on the grass at night and focus your attention on the moon.
- You can also lie down and focus your mind on the smallest notes of your favorite symphony.
- Lie down comfortably and try to focus on each word of your favorite song; one whose lyrics touch your heart.
- Sit in a lotus pose and try fixing your focus on the space between the eyebrows called the third eye.
- Sit in a meditative pose close to a clock and focus your attention on the sound of the movement of the clock hands.
- You can also focus your mind on your favorite flower, fruit whatever.
- You can sit and focus on a picture of your favorite person or God that you revere.
- There are some who practice chakra meditation which has been discussed in the subsequent chapter in details.

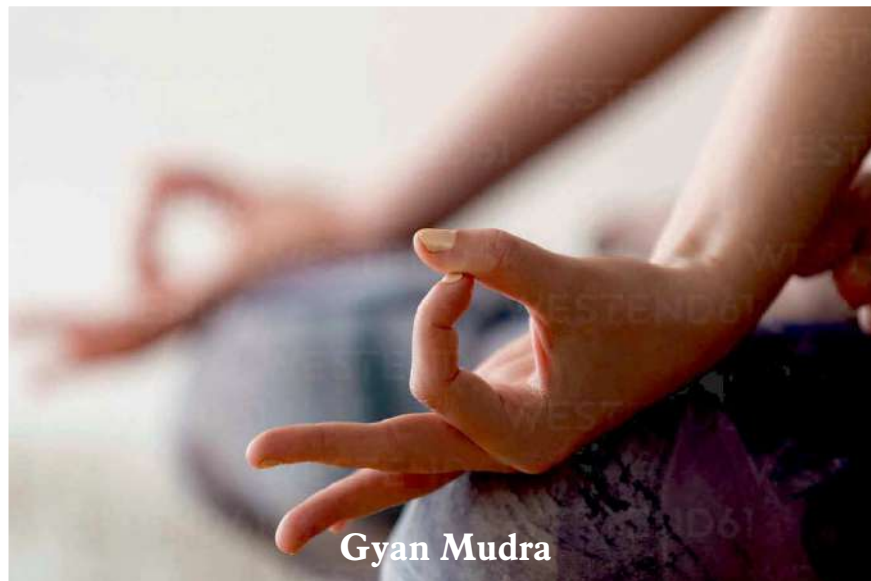
Once Dharana is refined, the concentration starts moving from an external object to the inner most self; where the soul or the Atman resides. For good Dharana, the breath has to be slow and deliberate. Dharana is not easy as the mind tends to wander. The practitioner has to train the mind to keep coming back to the object of focus without increasing the speed of the breathing or getting restless. With practice this struggle will decline and one will be able to practice Dharana with relative ease.



Dhyan Mudra



Anjali Mudra



Gyan Mudra

POSTURE FOR THE MEDITATIVE PRACTICE OF DHARANA AND DHYANA

Sit comfortably in the Lotus pose or Sukhasana. The spine and the head should be in straight line and erect. A curved spine impedes the flow of prana or vital life force and should be avoided. The hands and legs should not be outstretched as during meditation, a current is produced in the body which is very positive and revitalizing. This current is transmitted into the air and its benefits lost, when we keep the arms and legs extended. The feet and the fingers should be kept tucked in or as close to the body as possible to keep all the positive vibrations centered.

Most take time to be able to work out the correct position of the hands and may find sitting in the Lotus pose, which requires you to sit cross legged on the ground a little cumbersome. One can sit on a mat or a carpet so that the ankles don't hurt or else even use a cushion to sit on to elevate your hips slightly. For those who have spinal issues or can't sit on the ground for long can sit comfortably in a large chair with their feet up and curled in. you can use a cushion to support the spine and make it more comfortable till you get used to sitting with the spine straight.

Those with spinal issues or other ailments can also meditate lying down in Shavasana. To do that it is recommended that you lie on your back with your legs shoulder-width apart, arms extended straight on either side palms up, at a 45-degree angle to the torso and the toes relaxed and slightly dropped on either side. If the back feels strained, then one use a thin soft pillow under the head or knees, whatever works better.

Frankly, once you master the practice of meditation, you could meditate in any position, even while standing or walking!

The hands hold a wealth of energy that should be cultivated during meditation, not dispersed. Learning comfortable hand mudras for your meditation practice can enhance your meditation practice and offer you spiritual benefits as well. Finding a hand mudra that's most comfortable for you is essential to a sustained meditation practice, because it offers you balance and control, comfort, and spiritual value. The Dhyana mudra is the most favoured hand position. It involves placing your hands on the lap with the left hand on top or vice versa with the two-thumb touching softly along their tips. The soft touch signifying sealing or an uninterrupted transmission of energy from one half of the body to another. You can also keep the thumbs pressed against the palms if you find that more comfortable. Some people might want to keep a soft pillow or cushion on the lap and rest the hands on it. Dhyana in Sanskrit means balance and equilibrium and is a perfect fit. The mudra is known to calm the mind and help reduce stress and anxiety. This position also does not apply any stress on the shoulders and the arms and allows for a more peaceful and comfortable meditation session.

Some practitioners prefer to meditate in the Prayer or Anjali Mudra which is a Sanskrit term which means salutation. In this mudra the hands are held together, the palms and fingers pressing against each other and held close to the sternum. If the palms feel strained, you may bend the knuckles slightly to make space between the palms akin to a flower bud. This mudra is known to connect both sides of the brain and offers balance and tranquillity. This mudra adds a spiritual dimension to the meditative session.

The third mudra is the Gyan mudra. Named after a Sanskrit word 'Gyan' which means ultimate or the supreme Knowledge, this is the most preferred mudra of the true Yogis. For this rest the hands gently on the knees with the palms facing upwards and gently press the tip of the thumb against the tip of the forefinger, do not apply excessive pressure or strain. The other fingers are kept straight and relaxed with a slight bend.

This mudra is very good for calming the mind and hence is very good for treating anxiety, chronic headaches and insomnia. The tip of thumb is known to be the centre of the pituitary and endocrine glands and thus, when we put slight but constant pressure on them, they revitalise the two most important glands of the body.



CHAKRA MEDITATION

The Sanskrit word “chakra” means a “wheel” or “disk”. These chakras are astral bodies that are located along the spine, from the anus to the top of the head and are considered to be the energy centres of the body. These wheels or disks are nerve bundles that radiate out energy to the organ associated with the chakra through the network of channels called nadis in Yoga. The Sanskrit term ‘nadi’ meaning a hollow stalk or tube. Thus, in Yoga science, Nadis are canular organs of the subtle body through which energy flows. Although Yoga science identifies 114 different chakras or energy nodal points in the body, it focuses on the seven most important ones. Each of these Chakras coincide with a specific organ/gland in our physical body and each emit a specific colour and energy. By keeping these chakras healthy, aligned and open, we have full control over our mental, physical and emotional health. There is a seed mantra associated with each mantra and humming this seed mantra while meditating also helps augment the benefits.

Chakra meditation is the best way to keep these chakras healthy, balanced and in alignment, the importance of which you would better understand as you read further on the description of each chakra. The basic principle is to sit comfortably in a lotus pose and close your eyes gently and focus on the chakra you wish to repair or else focus on all for 3-5 minutes each. Once you focus on the chakra, imagine a wheel of the colour associated with the chakra spinning around in the clockwise direction diffusing the chakra with the same colour light. Once your focus improves, you will see the brightness of the chakra illuminate your being. Every inhalation should add to energising the chakra of focus and every exhalation removing all its negativity and impurities. It is advised to go from the lowest chakra at the base of the spine to the highest located on the crown of the head. Once you get to master it, it will allow you to scan your entire body and intuitively you will be able to tell as to which particular chakra needs your urgent or greater attention.

Chakra meditation is the best way to get to know your own self and once you understand your own mental, emotional and physical being you will be able to tap your own infinite energy a lot better and lead a happier and more productive life.

At Carnoustie, we advise that you start the meditation process under a learned Guru and then once you understand the method, you could make it a part of your routine or else focus exclusively on the ones that seem to be causing you any form of mental, emotional and physical distress.

Chakra meditation when done regularly helps alleviate a lot of physical ailments, anxiety, stress and helps to get rid of all negative emotions like anger, jealousy, lust, greed etc. One becomes calmer, content, more focussed with a sharper intuitive sense and will power and becomes capable of deeper selfless love and compassion for all. The person exudes positivity and become magnet for the others. This can be used effectively by people from all walks of life to become more productive professionally and personally.



MULADHARA CHAKRA - ROOT CHAKRA

The word Muladhara comes from two Sanskrit words: Mula meaning “root” and Adhara, which means “support” or “base.” This chakra is located Mujadara Chakra is located at the base of the spine between the anus and the genitals and covers the first three vertebra. It emits the color red and represents the element earth. It is characterized by the emotions of energetic enthusiasm, steadiness, motivation and self-reliance. When this chakra is out of balance or blocked, the person begins to feel a sense of inertia, unstable, fearful, insecure and frustrated. As soon as this chakra is balanced the person goes back to feeling stable, confident, stable, energetic, independent and strong. This chakra is extremely important as the other chakras are placed above it and if the base chakra is shaky than the very basic foundation of our physical, mental and emotional health is shaken and weak. When imbalanced Physical ailments related to the colon, bladder, lower back, leg, or feet occur. Prostrate problems in men and eating disorders are caused by the imbalance of this chakra.

ROOT CHAKRA MEDITATION:

Sit in the lotus pose with your shoulders back and your spine in straight alignment. Relax and close your eyes gently and breathe deeply and shift the focus to your anus and imagine it sitting on a red lotus or a red ball of fire. As you inhale deeply through the nose contract the anus as though you are breathing through it and release it deep into the earth as you exhale. The inhalation and exhalation should be synchronised with the inward and outward movement of your anus, all the while imagining it to be sitting on the red lotus. Do not strain uncomfortably. As you master this meditation one can take a gentle humming sound LAM as we breathe out through gently shut lips. It more like a humm called LAM!

Since this chakra corresponds to the sense of smell one can also meditate by focussing on the tip of your nose while doing the above.

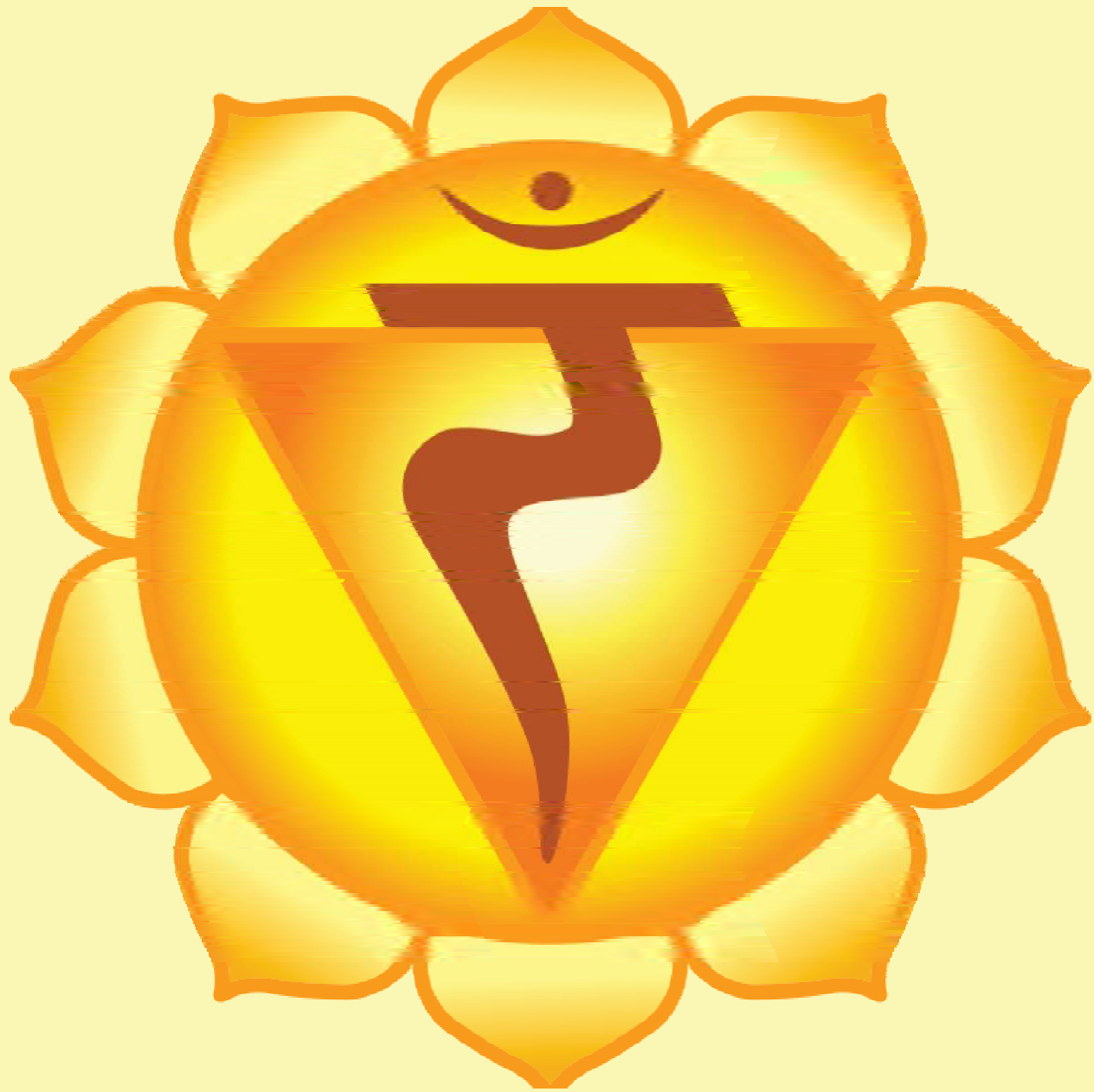


SVADHISHTHANA CHAKRA - SACRAL CHAKRA

The Sanskrit term Svadhishtana is derived from Sanskrit words 'sva' meaning "one's own," and 'adisthana', meaning home or dwelling place. It is also believed to have been derived from the Sanskrit term 'svad,' which means to taste with pleasure or "enjoy. This chakra is located in the lower abdomen, about four fingers below the navel. It emits the color orange and represents the water element. This chakra is connected to our emotions, desire and sexuality and is characterised by qualities like creativity, innovation, inspiration, sensuality and sexuality. When this chakra is blocked the person feels irritable, bored, uninspired and lethargic. Creativity fades and one lacks inspiration and begins to be overly obsessive about sex resulting in neurotic overindulgence without the joy and pleasure associated with the act or have very low libido. People who are obsessed with sex are not very creative and experience a creative block. So, a balance is also a must. If the chakra is blocked, then one can suffer from ailments related to the sexual organs or urinary system. Addiction of all varieties be it drugs, alcohol, pain killers, food, sex, gambling etc are all the outcomes of imbalance of this chakra.

SACRAL CHAKRA MEDITATION

Sit in the lotus pose with your shoulders back and your spine in straight alignment. Relax and close your eyes gently and breathe deeply. Picture a spinning orange circle in the location of your sacral chakra and focus and meditate on it. Since the Sacral chakra is associated with the water element, imagine the orange light of the chakra spreading in the area in small rippling waves and slowly enveloping your whole body. You will find yourself feeling warm and secure. Do it for as long as you feel like it. As you master this meditation one can take a gentle humming sound VAM as we breathe out through gently shut lips. It more like a humm called VAM!

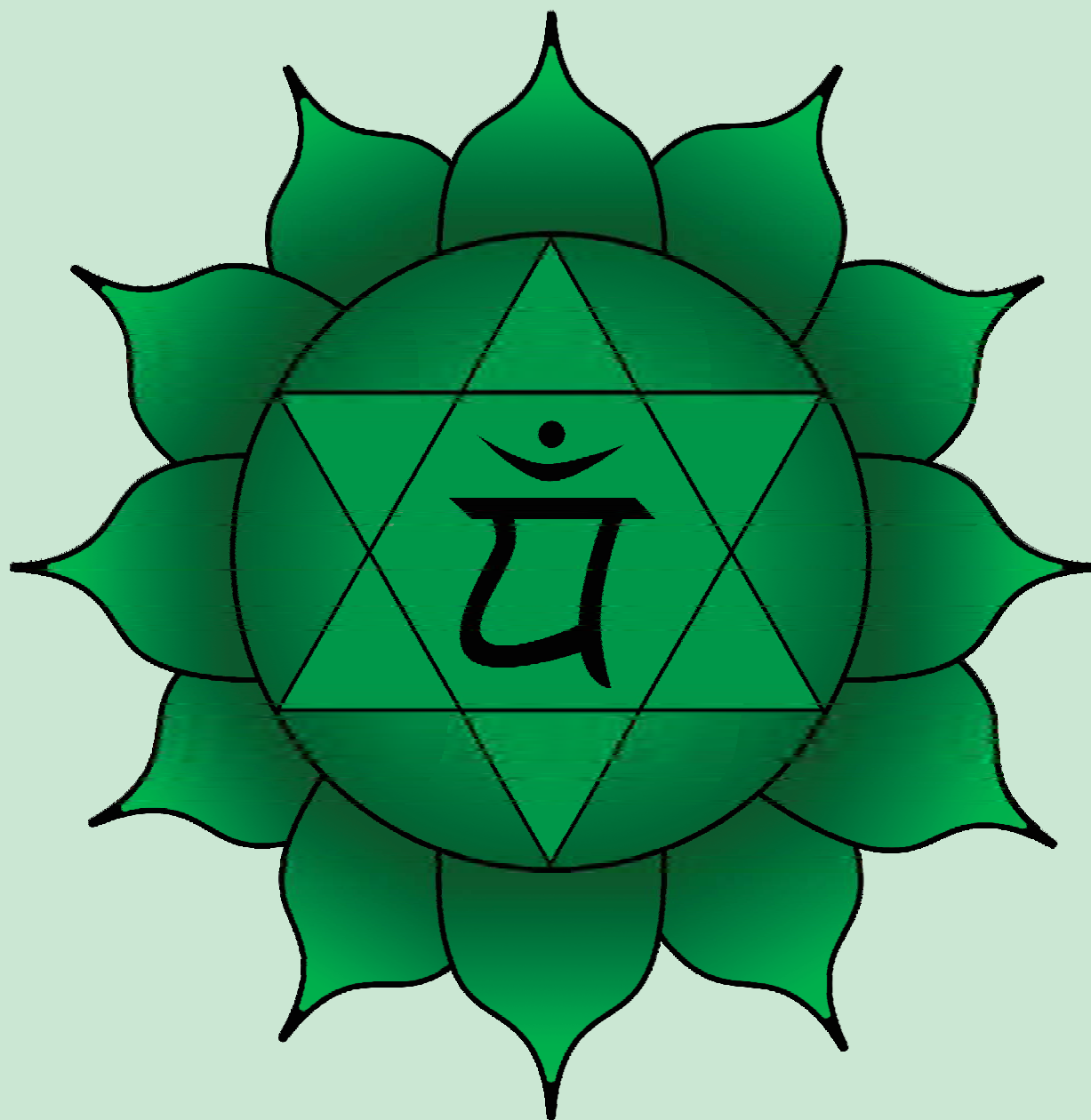


MANIPURA CHAKRA - SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA

The word “Manipura” means a lustrous gem. This chakra lies four fingerbreadths above the navel. This chakra is associated with the fire element. The fire energy of the Solar Plexus Chakra plays a significant role in digestion and in the effective absorption of nutrients in the body. This chakra manifests power and self-confidence and sharp intellect. When the Solar Plexus Chakra is in balance, a person is self-confident, secure and focused. However, malfunction and consequent imbalance of this chakra causes lethargy, low self-esteem, insecurities , overeating, weight gain, digestive system disorders, hypoglycaemia, diabetes, deficiencies, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome and ailments related to the pancreas, liver, and colon.

MANIPURA CHAKRA MEDITATION

Sit in the lotus pose with your shoulders back and your spine in straight alignment. Deeply inhaling slowly draw your arms up to the sky while imagining a bright yellow flame burning in the core of your abdomen. As you exhale, lower your arms in one fluid motion. If you prefer not moving your arms just sit in lotus pose and imagine inhaling through the navel and exhaling from between the eyebrows while humming its mantra RAM , pronounced as RUM. Repeat at least 15 times. Whatever way you choose to do it, keep a pleasant smile on and feel the powerful golden yellow ball of energy heal and empower your entire being.



ANAHATA CHAKRA - HEART CHAKRA

Anahata is a Sanskrit word which means unhurt, unstruck and unbeaten. Anahata Chakra or the Heart Chakra, is located in the heart region. It emits a green aura and it is associated with the element of air. It is characterised by self-love, love for others, joy, empathy and forgiveness. Just as air spreads everywhere, similarly love too spreads when given in abundance. That is why the saying “love is in the air”. When this chakra is aligned and balanced, you feel encircled by love, compassion, and joy and connected to the world around you and you are seen as loving and caring. It lets you see and appreciate the beauty around you and keeps you connected to everything around you including your own self. However, if imbalanced it causes ailments of the heart, lungs, chest, arms, and hands. It makes the person feel unworthy and unloved and the person becomes very distrusting and suspicious of others and there is a lot of anger and jealousy in relationships. The person stays in the victim mode and begins to isolate him/herself.

ANAHATA CHAKRA - HEART CHAKRA MEDITATION

Sit in the lotus pose with your shoulders back and your spine in straight alignment. You can also do this laying on your back. Make yourself comfortable. Imagine your collar bone expanding opening up the space that holds your heart. Focus on this space and notice how it rises with every inhalation and falls as you exhale. As you inhale, feel your abdomen expand and fill your lungs with fresh air and a green emerald light entering your body and dispersing gently over the heart region and as you exhale, feel your abdomen and your chest area contract. As you begin to feel better and happier, you can also imagine embracing all those you love with the green light. Do it for as long as you feel like it. As you master this meditation one can take a gentle humming sound YAM (pronounced as Yummmmm) as we breathe out through gently shut lips.



VISHUDDHA CHAKRA - THROAT CHAKRA

In Sanskrit word 'Vishuddha' means “**especially pure**”. As this chakra governs the mouth, tongue, and neck, it relates to communication and your capacity to comprehend and speak your innermost truth. As the name suggests, this chakra is located at the base of the throat, overlapping the thyroid gland. It emits a bright blue color and it is associated with the element of space.

Vishuddha Chakra is characterised by positive and confident expression, faith, and the ability to communicate with clarity and honesty. A person with a balanced throat chakra embraces his/her unique personality. Imbalance of the Throat Chakra may lead to nervousness, and the inability to articulate one's thoughts. If this chakra is blocked it can cause problems in the endocrine system and the thyroid. **Excessive stress is not good for the health of this chakra.**

VISHUDDHA CHAKRA - THROAT CHAKRA MEDITATION

Sit in the lotus pose with your shoulders back and your spine in straight alignment. Relax and close your eyes gently and breathe deeply. Picture a bright blue light permeating the entire throat region and focus and meditate on it. Do it for as long as you feel like it. As you master this meditation one can take a gentle humming sound HUMMMM and let it resonate in the throat region as we breathe out through gently shut lips.



AJNA CHAKRA - THIRD EYE CHAKRA

The Sanskrit word Ajna pronounced as, Agya means between the brow or the third eye. Ajna Chakra is located in between the eyebrows. It is free of any associate and emits an indigo blue coloured aura.

This chakra in Yoga science signifies the subconscious mind and links us to the vast universe. They say while the eyes can see the past and the present the third eye or the Ajna chakra allows you to see the future. In other words when this chakra is energised , a person's intuitive powers are heightened. It enhances and expands the capacity of all the five senses in the body and is seen as the gateway to higher consciousness. When this chakra is balanced the person rises above worldly desires and become more spiritual, intuitive and at peace. Imbalance of this chakra causes indecisiveness, confusion, lack of focus and purpose, depression and anxiety. The physical indicators of an imbalanced third eye chakra are ailments related to the eyes, brain, pituitary and pineal Gland, hypothalamus and the endocrine system.

AJNA CHAKRA MEDITATION

Sit in a comfortable meditative lotus ensuring that the spine and the head remain a straight alignment. Gently, close your eyes and focus all your energies on your third eye. While doing so also keep the focus on the breathing. As you inhale imagine an indigo blue wheel spinning in the clockwise direction on the third eye and its positive light spreading through the area. Let all negative thoughts and emotions melt away as you exhale while humming OM through gently closed lips. Extend the 'OM' hum to allow it to resonate through every bit of your body. You can also do it silently mentally. You can repeat the chanting for 5 to 15 minutes.



SAHASRARA CHAKRA - CROWN CHAKRA

This chakra is named after the Sanskrit word Sahasrara meaning 'infinite'. Located at the top of the head, it is also called the Crown Chakra. It's a symbol of a strong connection with the supreme or enlightened Self. It emits a pure white light or violet colour. The seed mantra of Sahasrara Chakra is AUM. It is considered to influence brain functions such as memory, intelligence, and sharp focus. This controls our spiritual and mental intellect.

When this chakra is energised and balanced, the person is in eternal bliss and unaffected by the highs and lows of his/her life and worldly affairs. The Self is no longer ruled by the ego and all positive emotions take over. It enhances our spiritual understanding and brings calmness and unfettered serenity. However, when this chakra is imbalanced or blocked, the person experiences restlessness, disillusionment, monotony, cynicism and lethargy. The person is easily overwhelmed by problems, becomes self-destructive and chases after external spiritual support.

CROWN CHAKRA MEDITATION

Sit in a comfortably in the lotus pose with your head and spine in straight alignment. Bring your hands in a 'mudra' position by placing your hands on your knees and turning your palms towards the sky. Shut your eyes gently and calmly inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. As you breathe imagine a white lotus unfurling and diffusing its pure white light through the crown of the head to the entire brain and slowly spreading throughout your body. Chanting the seed mantra 'AUM' as you exhale helps in deeper meditation and focus. The AUMMMMM should resonate and reverberate throughout every cell of your being. It need not be hummed aloud and if done so should not be too loud either.



TRULY UNDERSTANDING DHYANA YOGA

Dhyana or meditation is not easy as the mind is restless and playing tricks with us all the time. Thus, Dhyana requires serious effort, self-discipline and perseverance. One distressed day should not disturb the routine practice of Dhyana. To make Dhyana easier for beginners, one can concentrate on the energy giving sun, the life saving air that gives us oxygen, the ocean/ rivers that give us water, a beautiful quiet place that you adore, any spiritual sign or God that you have faith in. Strangely, the moment you sit to meditate in Dhyana, all kinds of negative thoughts seem to suddenly cross your mind to disturb you. It's not only negative thoughts, some complain about remembering chores or some pending office work just when they decide to sit for dhyana. The best way to deal with these distractions is to look at them as obstacles preventing you from experiencing bliss and tranquillity and focussing on not allowing them to overpower you. You will gradually loosen up and the concentration will become effortless calming the mind and letting you embrace and process the thoughts; however negative they may be. Over a period of time, the mind will become strong enough to clear these thoughts to let the mind be rested and blank. In this blankness lies a serene quiet. This silence brings strength and joy and rejuvenates and invigorates every cell of our being. Dhyana should not mean absence of obstacles. It is an exercise that elevates you to exist above them so that you can look down on those very negative elements that earlier threatened to overwhelm and devour you.

Ancient yogis believed that Dhyana was a precious commodity that could be more easily attained if one had the right moral fabric. Giving up greed and negative emotions like anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, lust etc is an effort one should make to experience the true bliss of Dhyana. Dhyana requires self-control and self-discipline requiring the individual to be vigilant and self-aware to ensure that these negative emotions don't mitigate the positive impact of Dhyana.

Progressively, graduate to understanding that the body, made up of destructible five elements, will eventually go into nothingness and the focus should be on the eternal soul that resides in us. This soul is untouched and pure. It is fearless and capable of achieving the impossible. Focus on this illuminating and indestructible soul or Atman to experience real joy. This is the state of Dhyana. Dhyana opens the flood doors of calm and peace, a state where the mind glows with radiant spiritual strength that knows no fear and can overcome the most formidable obstacles or forces of nature. The mind empowered by Dhyana understands that he is one with nature and in the limitless cosmos, he is just one tiny inconspicuous/insignificant element close to nothing, making it shed its ego. Once the ego is shed, one experiences indescribable peace as one doesn't have to struggle to prove a point anymore! This surrender to the eternal universe and the indestructible soul brings a certain grace in one's demeanour.

Dhyana using focus on a certain object is concrete, whereas Dhyana or concentration on an abstract idea such a truth, peace, purity, beauty etc is abstract dhyana. The practitioner, through Dhyana or meditation peels the layers of the mind and is able to penetrate deeper into its inner most crevices where greater wisdom and clarity resides. Consistent practice of Dhyana opens the mind to intuitive knowledge and makes the mind calm and steady. The person becomes fearless and feels a mysterious power guiding it reassuringly.

It is important to note that Dhyana is food for the mind, body and soul. Just as we require food for our physical self, we need dhyana to rejuvenate and feed our mind and soul. It goes without saying that a healthier body resides in a happy and peaceful mind and an elevated soul. Just as we need food every day, we need to do dhyana everyday too. It should be an integral part of our daily routine.

As you practice Dhyana, you will begin to get addicted to it. Once that state is achieved, one tends to avoid negative situations like fighting or quarrelling as one realises that screaming and losing one's temper wastes precious energy that could be channelised for one's better welfare and for the good of others. One tends to become more aware of the self-destructive tendencies of hurting or causing pain to others as for every action there is equal and opposite reaction both in terms of the moment and its long-term karmic repercussions. Dhyana becomes even more blissful if one practices self-control in terms of what we speak and how we speak. It is called Vak Tapas or austerity of speech which makes the practitioner weigh his/her words before saying something negative.

They say a Yogi who meditates regularly has a magnetic personality that draws everyone to him/her. His/her very presence in the room can never go overlooked and his/her aura exudes positivity and harmony. A yogi doesn't necessarily have to be an ascetic, he could be the man next door, a manager in a company, a CEO, a politician ... anyone can become a true Yogi. It has no religious, class or geographical restrictions. Anyone who practices dhyana and refines his/her life is capable of being a Yogi.



ANANDAMAYA KOSHA - THE SHEATH OF ETERNAL BLISS

The last of the five koshas is anandamaya kosha - the bliss sheath. Anandamaya encompasses not the feeling of bliss, but rather, the experience of bliss. In contrast to vijnanamaya kosha, you do not witness the bliss sheath, you are the bliss. Bliss can be thought of not as an ecstatic happiness or even joy, but a steady state of being, no matter what circumstance arises.

The state of wholeness, of integration with the moment and with yourself, encompasses the inner sheath of anandamaya. This bliss state is usually experienced in fleeting moments, but can remain for longer periods. Importantly, anandamaya is still a sheath, a layer that can be peeled back. When anandamaya is peeled away, we reach atman - our very center. Atman is our direct connection with the divine, with the essence of all that is. It is our pure consciousness.

Anandamaya pervades each of the previous outer sheaths, but is only experienced once we are able to peel the illusions of each sheath away to reveal our true nature. Anandamaya can be experienced in those moments when you are wholly immersed in that which you are doing - when you no longer separate yourself from your experience.

Striving to reach anandamaya kosha is a futile attempt, for it is only revealed when we release any form of mind control over it. Anandamaya is not of the mind. It is a deeper experience than that which can be contemplated. Even describing it in words is not completely accurate. The bliss of a child fully immersed in the moment - that is anandamaya.

Taittiriya Upanishad says: "Hidden inside it (Vigyanamaya Kosha) is yet a subtler body, composed of pure joy. It pervades the other bodies and shares the same shape. It is experienced as happiness, delight, equanimity and bliss. It further defines anandamaya kosha as having the shape or form of a person with love as its head, joy as its right wing and delight as its left wing, bliss as its trunk and Brahman as its support or foundation".

This is the final state called NIRVIKALPA Samadhi or the super conscious state. In this state the form or perception of dhyana melts away and so does the meditation and the meditator. There is just pure connect with the eternal soul and pure indestructible bliss. This is the state when the practitioner and his meditation become one. This state liberates you from all the joys and sorrows and you become with the universe. You are now free from pain, sorrow, fear, anxiety, doubt and all other feeling who govern the lesser mortals. The river of self has now joined the ocean. The self just melts away into blissful nothingness in total surrender to the universe. This helps your taste spiritual enlightenment when you swim with gay abandon in the divine river of Joy. You are protected from the vagaries of mortality and you can feel nothing but the divine embrace and the divine indestructibly ecstasy. There is nothing to see or hear anymore as the senses melt into pure consciousness with whole surrender.

This state does not mean that you stop living your regular life. It just means that now you have the capacity to live life with everlasting joy and compassion and you are able to explore unfathomable potential. You get a better understanding of your Karma and your role in this eternity and hence nothing fazes you anymore. you don't fear death, and no love or hatred or another being can affect the way you think and your happiness. You are liberated and your soul is enlightened. You are now in sync with your soul and directly connected to the divine. This state is not easy to attain as the negative forces and your Karmic limitations keep pulling you back. Only the brave break into this frontier.



ATTAINING SAMADHI - ETERNAL BLISS

Samadhi is a state of full wisdom where the mind merges with the Brahman or this universe. The individual melts into the universe. There is no ego and the person is freed of pain, sorrow, fear and delusion. The mind is finally rested and peaceful.

Samadhi is of two types:

SAVIKALPA SAMADHI: this is where the merging of the atman or soul with the universe or brahman is the object of meditation. It is brilliant but slightly superficial and one can fall into the lower kosha at any time.

NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI: this is the highest state. Here the individual soul melt and merges with the supreme soul and this allows the person to go beyond worldly misery and joy into incessant calm and serenity. It is an experience of oneness with the absolute. In this state even prana or breath of life stops. It is described as a superconscious state wherein there is a union with God. It is a state of everlasting joy and peace. This is a blessed state where the meditator goes into a 'sleepless sleep'. This is a kind of a spiritual anaesthesia. Its like floating in an infinite ocean of light. Time and space vanish and the ego disappears.

It is important to note that Samadhi or Nirvana is not the monopoly of the ascetics or the sages, it can be achieved by every human being. It just needs purity of thought, steadiness of posture and the one pointedness of the mind; also called Ekagrata. It is worth the effort, as in samadhi, the yogi or the practitioner not only experiences infinite bliss, but also attains supreme knowledge. He/she grasps the highest truth through a conscious communion with God.



Carnoustie
Ayurveda & Wellness Resort

www.carnoustieresorts.com

Book design and content : courtesy Z Consulting Location: Carnoustie Ayurveda and Wellness Resort, Kerala. India